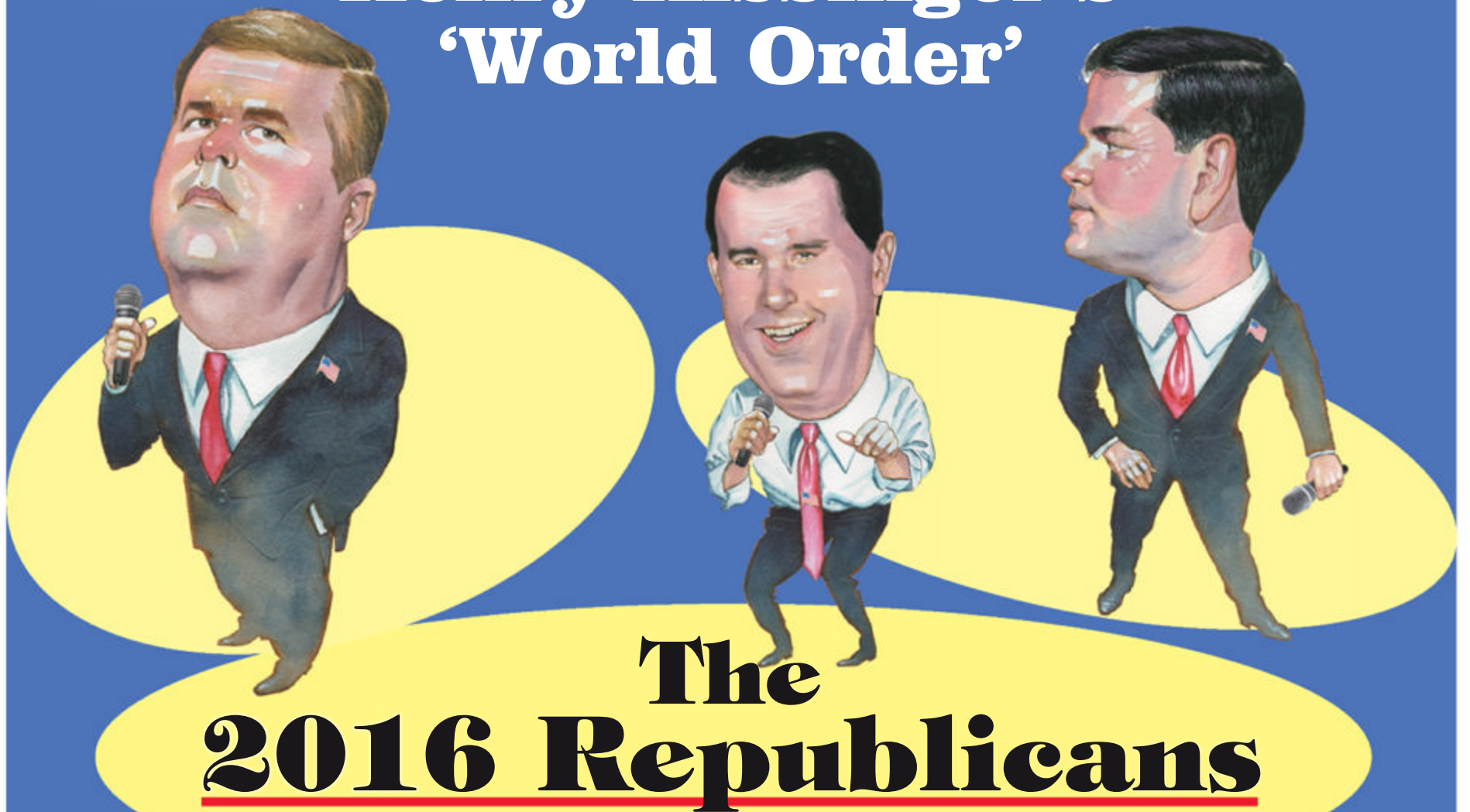


**Mikhail Khodorkovsky:
'My Fellow Prisoners'**

The New York Review **of Books**

March 19, 2015 / Volume LXII, Number 5

**Jessica Mathews on
Henry Kissinger's
'World Order'**



The 2016 Republicans

BY MICHAEL TOMASKY

Enrique Krauze: The New Cuba?

**Frank Rich:
The Road to Bob Hope**

**H. Allen Orr:
How Selfish Are We?**

IRA Deadline
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CONNECTING THE DOTS

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Contents

4	Mikhail Khodorkovsky	My Fellow Prisoners
6	John Banville	The Dog by Joseph O'Neill
10	Jessica T. Mathews	World Order by Henry Kissinger America in Retreat: The New Isolationism and the Coming Social Disorder by Bret Stephens
14	David Cole	Can They Crush Obamacare?
16	Geoffrey O'Brien	Iolanta an opera by Peter Tchaikovsky Bluebeard's Castle an opera by Béla Bartók a double bill at the Metropolitan Opera, New York City
18	Michael Tomasky	American Dreams: Restoring Economic Opportunity for Everyone by Marco Rubio Blue Collar Conservatives: Recommitting to an America That Works by Rick Santorum The Way Forward: Renewing the American Idea by Paul Ryan One Nation: What We Can All Do to Save America's Future by Ben Carson with Candy Carson God, Guns, Grits, and Gravy by Mike Huckabee Unintimidated: A Governor's Story and a Nation's Challenge by Scott Walker with Marc Thiessen
21	Frank Rich	Hope: Entertainer of the Century by Richard Zoglin
24	Enrique Krauze	Cuban Revelations: Behind the Scenes in Havana by Marc Frank
27	H. Allen Orr	Does Altruism Exist?: Culture, Genes, and the Welfare of Others by David Sloan Wilson
29	John Balaban	Poem
30	Andrew Delbanco	The Scorpion's Sting: Antislavery and the Coming of the Civil War by James Oakes The Civil War: Told by Those Who Lived It edited by Brooks D. Simpson, Stephen W. Sears, and Aaron Sheehan-Dean
34	Fintan O'Toole	Echo's Bones by Samuel Beckett, edited by Mark Nixon
37	Alan Ryan	Moral Imagination by David Bromwich
40	Jana Prikryl	Poem
41	Stanley Wells	Making Make-Believe Real: Politics as Theater in Shakespeare's Time by Garry Wills
43	Mark Lilla	Le Suicide français by Éric Zemmour
45	Darryl Pinckney	The Truth About Selma: An Exchange with John G. Stewart and Harry W. Gamble Jr.
45	Letters from	Nathaniel Rich, R. Vanita, and Wendy Doniger

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My Fellow Prisoners

Mikhail Khodorkovsky

THE GUARDS

I'm writing these notes because I want people who care about these things to know what I have personally experienced in prison.

Over time I've turned from an ordinary victim into an interested observer, and I've discovered that for many people the prison world remains terra incognita. And yet in our country one in every hundred people is currently in prison; one in ten (maybe by now one in seven) of the male population passes through prison at some point in their lives.

Moreover, prison has a terrible effect on the majority of both prisoners and guards. It's not yet clear, in fact, which group is affected more.

Society has to do something about this human tragedy. And for a start people need to know about it.

This story is about the guards.

The people who feel most uninhibited in prison are the police investigators, known in the vernacular as the "operatives." Their official duty is to prevent crimes that someone might be thinking of committing, and to uncover those that have already been committed. As a result they're not much constrained by prison regulations. Facial rearrangements and endless interrogations, mobile phones and drugs—these form just a small part of their standard arsenal.

The operatives usually know how to work with people and are good at it. They know how to talk, how to listen. But there are exceptions.

Take the head of the police investigation unit, a twenty-seven-year-old called Pelshe, whose first name and patronymic are so hard to pronounce that by common agreement he's long been known simply as Sergei Sergeevich. He's not a man for small talk. He fixes his transparent, ice-cold eyes right into yours and lurches about desperately, caught in a verbal trap of harrumphing and interjections. When he's sober, that is.

In fact, he's rarely sober. When you see those slightly protruding ears glowing red like traffic lights and catch that faint whiff, you know he's in a good mood and his speech will flow smoothly. But at the same time it's a signal to the unwary: "Keep your mouth shut." Alcohol has no effect on the professional operative's memory.

However, Sergei Sergeevich is just as likely to treat the most taciturn prisoner to a dose of his none-too-gentle fists. He hits people like a true professional, leaving minimum trace, though the recipient spends a week groaning and pissing blood. But no one reckons this "talking to" is particularly bad. The general opinion is that he's not an animal; "freelance operatives" are far rougher.

As well as applying his fists, Sergei Sergeevich can also treat you to tea and sweets, and give you cigarettes; he'll even let you make a call on his mobile. Though you can be sure he'll make a note of the number.

Sergei Sergeevich regards the visits of ad hoc commissions as an unavoidable evil, and his attitude is no different from that of the other inhabitants of the prison colony. In order to feed these numerous commissions, Sergei Sergeevich generally collects funds from the staff. But if it's getting close to payday, then he might look for additional "support" from the prisoners themselves.

The detainees take an understanding approach to the problem and chip in. Sometimes, instead, they ask him to "sell" back something previously taken from them, like their telephone or another forbidden item. And then the "high contracting parties" reach a consensus, and a deal is struck.



Mikhail Khodorkovsky appearing on a TV screen installed inside a courtroom, Moscow, January 2004

Sergei Sergeevich lies to the court and commissions without a second thought.

"Sergei Sergeevich, who wrote this two-page explanation?" the judge asks.

"The convict Badayev, in his own hand," replies Pelshe firmly. "As is written."

"But Badayev is illiterate; it says so in his personal case file. He only had two years of school!"

Sergei Sergeevich says nothing, the traffic lights glow red.... You might think he's feeling embarrassed, but we all know the real reason. And Sergei Sergeevich is lost in his own thoughts. He doesn't give a stuff about the court. The convict Badayev does give a stuff, but nobody else gives a stuff about Badayev.

In the difficult years of reforms, representatives of the criminal world (so-called "overseers") kept the prisoners fed and prevented needless conflicts between them, while also embedding a criminal ideology among them. Now Sergei Sergeevich and his colleagues do the same thing, effectively training up the future foot soldiers of the criminal world.

"You're not a person, and those around you aren't people!" "You should just listen to your superiors and not think when following an order!" "The less you think, the better your life!"

These are the maxims that are hammered into the heads of eighteen- to

twenty-five-year-old detainees, and as a result the percentage that ends up back in jail is astronomical. Those who manage to stay out of prison do so in spite of it, not thanks to it.

In fact, this is why nobody is particularly surprised when a slightly more inebriated than usual Sergei Sergeevich yells at the top of his voice at roll call: "Who's the overseer here?! I'm the overseer!!!"

Indeed he is.

"Sergei Sergeevich," I ask him, "if you and your colleagues were to change places with the prisoners currently in here, no one would notice much of a difference, would they?"

"They wouldn't," he agrees, and seems not the least bit aggrieved by this state of affairs. He's the same as everybody else.

roughly half the rest of the country's prison population.

It was clear that he would be back. He'd already spent five of his twenty-three years behind barbed wire and showed little intention of changing his ways in the future. Although clearly not stupid, Kolya had grown up feeling rejected and unwanted. His life had been a constant battle with this feeling of rejection while being surrounded by similar outcasts.

Six months later I met Kolya again, now with a grisly scar on his stomach.

"Kolya, what happened?"

"Ah well, they got me with some gear again."

For a moment Kolya hesitated, but then told me the full story, which was later corroborated by others who had witnessed it. Having taken in Kolya as a repeat offender, the police investigators decided to charge him with an extra crime, for good measure. This kind of bargaining goes on all the time and is usually fairly open: you'll only get an additional couple of years, they say, if we ask the judge, but you'll have to carry the can for some robbery—and you'll get extra visiting rights or choose where you end up. Generally it's nothing more than a mobile phone robbery or some such. Kolya, after not much thought, agreed. But then for the identity parade they brought in an old woman whose purse, containing about two thousand rubles, had been snatched by some scum. The pensioner clearly remembered little about it and quickly "identified" the person indicated by the investigators.

At which point Kolya suddenly dug in his heels. "I've never touched an elderly person in my life, only people my own age. Robbing an old woman of her last ruble—no, I didn't sign up for that, and I won't do it. Whatever you do to me!" The investigators were dumbfounded. "Kolya, as far as the law's concerned there's no difference. The money is the same, so's the sentence. Why are you getting so steamed up? We can't go and turn all of this around just because you're feeling sensitive about it."

"I won't do it," said Kolya.

So they sent him back to his cell, "to think it over"—having first given him a bit of a beating, "as is only right and proper."

After a while he knocked on the cell door from inside; when they opened the food hatch—his guts came flying out. Kolya had "opened himself up," and some. Full-on hara-kiri. The scar is as wide as a finger and stretches half-way across his belly.

While the doctors were rushing across, others in the cell tried to stuff his entrails back in again.

It was a miracle they saved him. Now he's disabled, but he has no regrets. "If they'd gone and pinned that old woman's purse on me, I'd have died anyway," says Kolya—meaning the loss of his self-respect, without which his life is unimaginable.

I look at this man who has been sent down so often and think with a certain bitterness of the number of people on the outside who hold their honor far less dearly than he, who wouldn't see anything particularly bad about robbing an old man or woman of a couple of thousand rubles. Although their crime would be clothed in clever words. They have no shame.

And, like it or not, I feel proud of Kolya. □

KOLYA

It so happened that I met a young man, Nikolai (Kolya), as he was about to be released. There was nothing particularly remarkable about Nikolai. He was doing time for a fairly straightforward crime, drug possession—like



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The Dubai Gesture

John Banville

The Dog

by Joseph O'Neill.
Pantheon, 241 pp., \$25.95

The 1950s craze for science fiction, spurred by a combination of cold war paranoia, terror of the bomb, and a yearning for a bright, new, clean, and limitless world, threw up some wonderfully weird magazines. Most of the stories they contained were all too dispensable—or perhaps one was too young to appreciate them?—but who could forget their cover illustrations, depicting fantastical cities of the far future, with mile-high skyscrapers, viaducts soaring into the clouds, flying cars, and sky-borne trains. Nowadays, seeing photographs of the city of Dubai, we of the older generation rub our eyes in amazement. In this city in the desert, the future, that in our young days seemed impossibly far off, or just plain impossible, has already arrived, and—who would have thought?—it is just as dementedly kitschy as anything dreamed up for the covers of *New Worlds* or *Astounding Science Fiction*.

Joseph O'Neill, by a stroke of inspiration, has set his new novel, *The Dog*, in Dubai. The books by which he is best known, the prize-winning novel *Netherland*, and the earlier *Blood-Dark Track*, a family memoir, are primarily about place, and placelessness. This is hardly remarkable. O'Neill's own provenance, as *Blood-Dark Track* amply illustrates, is intricate in the extreme, his background a mélange every bit as mixed as Humbert Humbert's "salad of racial genes." One of his grandfathers was a slightly shady Turkish businessman, the other an Irish nationalist and member of the IRA—the "old" IRA, that is, which won, more or less, the War of Independence in the early 1920s, and went on through succeeding decades to fight for Irish unification, among other things, becoming in time the "new" IRA, the one we all know about.

O'Neill was born in Cork, but as a small child lived with his parents in various places abroad, including Mozambique, Turkey, and Iran, and, from the age of six, in the Netherlands, where he attended French- and English-speaking schools. Afterward he studied law at Girton College, Cambridge, and became a barrister at the English bar, and practiced law for ten years in London, before moving to New York and settling there in 1998. To say he has lived a peripatetic life is an understatement, even in our deracinated times. Hence his well-nigh obsessional search for his family roots, as chronicled in *Blood-Dark Track*. In that book O'Neill carried out a deep trawl through the lives and times of his Irish and Turkish grandfathers, their families, their jobs, their politics, and their strangely similar histories. It is a troubled work, as dark as the times and events that it investigates.

Netherland, too, with its strong echoes of *The Great Gatsby*, was concerned with deracination and the search for authenticity. Described by James Wood in *The New Yorker* as "one of the most remarkable post-colonial books I have ever read," the novel tells of the efforts of a Trinidadian-Indian

immigrant to the United States, the big-time hustler Chuck Ramkissoon, to make New York a center for international cricket and thereby complete the process of civilization that he thinks America sorely in need of. Chuck's colorful and ultimately tragic story is told to us by another immigrant, this one Dutch. Hans van den Broek is an oil-futures analyst married to, separated from, and ultimately reunited with a successful English lawyer, with whom, after the Twin Towers atrocity, he moves into the Chelsea Hotel. When the separation comes, his wife goes back home to London with their young



A 'pool ambassador' serving drinks in the pool at the Ritz-Carlton hotel, Dubai, 2013

son, leaving Hans on his own in New York, where he feels lost and adrift in the maimed city.

When the book was published, to wide acclaim, it was hailed as the September 11 novel the world imagined it had been waiting for.* Certainly the demolished Twin Towers loomed over the narrative, but their terrible fate was only one of a multiplicity of topics that O'Neill was addressing; indeed, it could be argued that chief among those topics was not modern-day barbarism but that oldest of old-fashioned novelistic concerns, the possibility, or impossibility, of living one's life as a romantic adventure. In his quest for transcendence, Chuck is every bit as anguished as Jay Gatsby standing in the dark in front of his mansion with his arms stretched out in silent yearning toward the green light at the end of Daisy Buchanan's dock. The American dream may have gone sour for millions of Americans, but for its transient immigrant population, so it seems, it is still vividly persuasive.

The unnamed Zurich-born Swiss-American lawyer who is the narrator of *The Dog*—who is, indeed, the Dog himself—has a first name beginning with X, so that is what we shall call him, for convenience. He has fled New York and settled, if that is the word,

among the questionable wonders of Dubai, after the disastrous and humiliating end of a nine-year affair with Jenn, a fellow corporate lawyer. One of the couple's insoluble problems, not harped upon, is that of the two, Jenn was more successful at her job, and certainly more determined, if not downright ruthless. Indeed, Jenn is tough not only in her professional life but also in her relations with our hapless hero. When their affair ends, after X decides, *Bartleby*-fashion, that it doesn't suit him to give a sperm sample—a wonderfully comic set-piece that O'Neill might have made more of—she cleans

out their joint bank accounts, leaving him next to penniless.

Lucky for X, then, or so it seems, that "in early 2007, in a New York City cloakroom," he runs into an old friend from student days in Ireland, one Eddie Batros, scion of a super-rich Lebanese family, who soon afterward offers him a job as "a Batros family trustee ('to keep an eye on our holdings, trusts, investment portfolios, etc.')." This will require X to move to Dubai, "where the Batros Group and indeed some Batros family members were nominally headquartered." X is moved to tears, literally, by the offer and by Eddie's heartfelt—though e-mailed—declaration of trust in his pal from Dublin days: "I know of no more honest man than you." Somehow, X being X, and Eddie obviously—to us—being Eddie, and this being the kind of novel that from the start it obviously is, we just know that in the end everything will go horribly wrong.

O'Neill, in this book, has come of age as a novelist. *Netherland*, for all its ambitions, many of which were fully achieved, was, as Zadie Smith in her review pointed out, an "anxious novel" written in a language "genteel and faintly archaic." Smith writes:

In the end what is impressive about *Netherland* is how precisely it knows the fears and weaknesses of its readers. What is disappointing is how much it indulges them. Out of a familiar love, like a lapsed High Anglican, *Netherland* hangs on to the rituals and garments of transcendence, though it well knows they are empty.

This is shrewd, and all too true. In the earlier novel, O'Neill seemed to conceive of himself as a late entrant to the high consistory of post-Victorian novelists, practitioners of what Zadie Smith calls "lyrical Realism," whose sad duty it is to render a fallen and chaotic world in a language—"genteel and faintly archaic"—washed at for so long by the filthy modern tide that its authenticity has been thoroughly undermined, so that it can only have any force nowadays by being put at the service of a sustained and languid irony. In *The Dog*, the mongrel that O'Neill triumphantly takes hold of the material and the language by which it is manipulated and gives the whole thing a good vigorous shake. One recalls Saul Bellow remarking how in his early novels he tried to be Flaubert, but then, with *The Adventures of Augie March*, he decided just to let rip.

The consequence of O'Neill's letting rip is something that, even at this early stage of its life, looks a lot like a comic masterpiece. The style he has devised for his semi-dystopian tale is a glorious amalgam of the demotic and the dandified. There are echoes here of J.G. Ballard and Martin Amis—what baleful fun Amis would have in Dubai!—of Bellow and Nabokov, of Woody Allen and Don DeLillo and Philip Roth when he was funny, of Wittgenstein—yes, Wittgenstein—and W.B. Yeats: "The falcon cannot hear the falconer. Everything turns to crap."

O'Neill is one of those rare writers who is not made nervous by the richness and the endless potential of literary language. There are sentences here of such meandering complexity, animadversions worthy of Proust at his wordiest, that the mind blanks two thirds of the way through them—the mind blanks, but the belly laughs. *The Dog* is as mordantly funny as the best of stand-up comedy. It is also as blessedly disdainful of plot—has life got a plot?—as one of Henry James's late immensities.

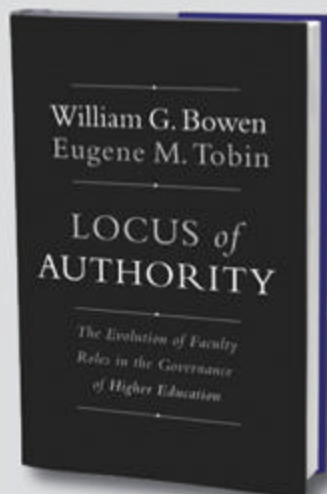
Much of the comedy, and indeed some of the mastery, is supplied by the setting. Googling "dubai," X comes upon a bewildering phantasmagoria:

I couldn't believe my eyes, in part because I was not actually meant to believe my eyes or was meant to believe them in a special way, because many of the image results were not photographs of real Dubai but, rather, of renderings of a Dubai that was under construction or as yet conceptual. In any case I was left with the impression of a fantastic actual and/or soon-to-be city, an abracadabrapolis in which buildings flopped against each other and skyscrapers looked wobbly or were rumpled or might be twice as tall and slender as the Empire State Building, a city whose coastline featured bizarre man-made peninsulas as well as those already-famous artificial islets known as The World, so named because they were grouped to suggest, to a bird's eye, a physical map of the world; a city where huge stilts rose out of the earth and

Jonas Bendixsen/Magnum Photos

*Zadie Smith, in a masterly review of *Netherland* in these pages (November 20, 2008), wisely wondered: "Were there calls, in 1915, for the Lusitania novel? In 1985, was the Bhopal novel keenly anticipated?"

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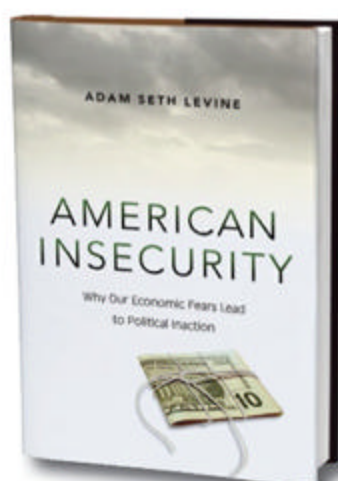
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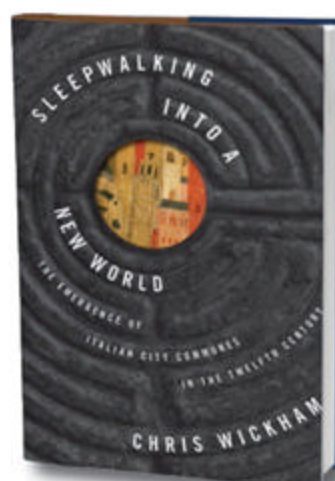
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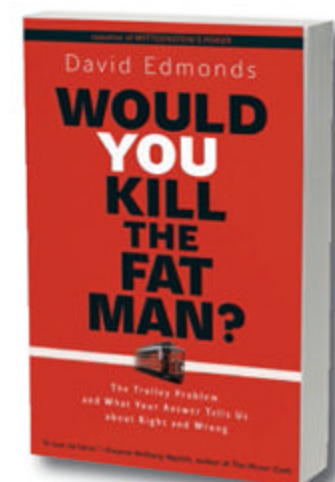
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disappeared like Jack's beanstalk, three hundred meters up, into a synthetic cloud. Apparently the cloud contained, or would in due course contain, a platform with a park and other amenities.

The joke, the black joke, of course, is that Dubai, like the rest of the world, ground spectacularly to a halt in the Great Crash of 2008, and might have sunk without trace into the Arabian sands—X gives a halfway reconciled expat's defensive nod to Ozymandias, King of Kings—had not its cannier, less overweening, and richer neighbors in the United Arab Emirates reached deep into their piles of petro-dollars and saved it from its own excesses. X, however, is loyal to his place of refuge, which, did he but know it, will prove all too temporary. "I do not align myself with the disparagers," he declares.

On the other hand, he does see the dispiriting outrageousness of the place: "Dubai's undeclared mission is to make itself indistinguishable from its airport." O'Neill has rich sport with the local peculiarities of custom and usage. Let us drop into the middle of one of those jumbo, mock-lawyerese sentences mentioned above:

...contrary to its accommodating and modern appearance, for the non-national the emirate is a vast booby trap of medieval judicial perils, and Johnny Foreigner must especially take great care when interacting with local citizens (who constitute only 10 percent or so of the population) because de facto there is one law for Abdul Emirati

and another for Johnny Foreigner, so that, for example, if Johnny is involved in an automobile collision with Abdul, responsibility for damage caused will in practice not be determined in accordance with familiar qualitative assessments of the acts and omissions of the parties involved but in accordance with considerations of identity, the local concept (supposedly alien to the person accustomed to Romano-Judeo-Christian jurisprudence) being that the applicability of the duty of care (known to some as the neighbor principle) is subject to modification by the nationalitative interrelation of the involved parties. I.e., it's not what you *do*, it's who you *are* vis-à-vis the person who does unto you or unto whom you do.

Eventually it will be one, or indeed a number, of those medieval legal booby traps that X falls headlong into, when the Batros family gets caught with its hands in the till—or, rather, in the washing machine—and he has to be the fall guy and take the rap.

But that fall into perdition is a long way off, and meanwhile there are superb set-pieces to be savored, such as X's abortive visit—when he was still with Jenn—to the IVF clinic where he waits among "a sadness of masturbators, as I will collectively name them," to offer up his sample of sperm. However, the clinic is a downer—"Onan himself would have found the setup a challenge"—and when the pornography on offer fails in its

stiffening effect, X gives up and returns home to break the news to Jenn. Who takes it badly. "I want a baby—you give me a baby! You owe me." This from a woman who, at the outset of their relationship, told X in offhand but no uncertain terms that the last thing she wanted was a child, just as the second-last thing she wanted was a dog.

Jenn is a wonderful and terrifying monster, one of those über-bitches straight out of Mailer-Bellow-Roth, for the creation of which O'Neill is likely to get a hodload of feminist brickbats flung at his head:

"You wait until I'm having fertility treatment, and then you quit? Oh, boy. It's like you've done this on purpose. Is that it? I'm right, aren't I? You've done this on purpose." ... She tore off her clothes and bent over and spread her ass cheeks, and said, "Fuck me! Go on! Fuck me! Can you do that? Get your cock out like a man! You fucking asshole! You coward! You had to wait until now? What's the matter? You don't like pussy? You fucking psychopathic asshole."

For all that, X continues, in his Dubian exile, to give Jenn the benefit of the doubt: "Even as I understood the doghouse as an outbuilding of the phony coupledness for which surely both of us were responsible, it was clearly a doghouse built by me, with my name on it." X's trouble with women is systemic, it seems. Even the Eastern European prostitutes in whose company he finds intermittent and melancholy relief turn out in the end to be unworthy of him. And then there is the curious case of Mrs. Ted Wilson.

Ted Wilson, *Mr. Ted Wilson*, is an enigma at the heart of the book, a figure at once humdrum and uncrackably mysterious. We first encounter him as "the Man from Atlantis," a legendary scuba diver—X also dives—who spends more time underwater than on land, who always dives alone, and who dives deeper and into more dangerous zones than anyone else would dare to go. He lives in *The Situation*, the Amisian named apartment block where X also lodges. We are given one glimpse of Wilson, in an elevator, after which he disappears, never to be seen or heard from again.

Then, one seemingly momentous day, Wilson's wife, who is referred to throughout as Mrs. Ted Wilson, turns up at X's door, convinced that he is an old scuba-diving buddy of her husband's and must know where he has gone to and why. The encounter, which reads like a dropped scene from Antonioni's *L'Avventura*, starts off with the suggestion of a possible future romance between X and the forsaken woman, and ends in a violent argument, provoked entirely by Mrs. Ted Wilson's aggressiveness, which causes X in his fury to hurl against the wall a plastic jar of Umbrian lentils—the detail is typical of O'Neill's deadpan humor. "There was an unusual brown explosion as the jar burst."

Mrs. Ted Wilson does appear again, tangentially, but never fulfils the promise, for good or ill, suggested by that strange, jagged scene. What or who is she meant to be? Is she meant to be anyone or anything at all, other than who and what she is, an ordinary man's ordinary wife, notable only for the fact that her husband has vanished into the

desert air? The incident, fraught with significance yet devoid of meaning, is reminiscent of one of Don DeLillo's more studied and burnished conundrums. Here, and frequently elsewhere in the book, the suspicion arises that far from being the fundamentally decent poor sap that he pretends to be, X is a Bartleby with ideas, and a moral sense, above his station. Everybody eventually lets him down, but a man can only be let down who has set himself up in a high place.

The Dog is, as we gradually discover, something of a trap for the unwary. It seems, on the surface, a brilliantly wrought but commonplace comedy of post-feminist maledom, in which an essentially inoffensive, well-meaning but clumsy *homme moyen sensuel*, more Candide than Caligula, falls foul of modern-day mores, or lack of.

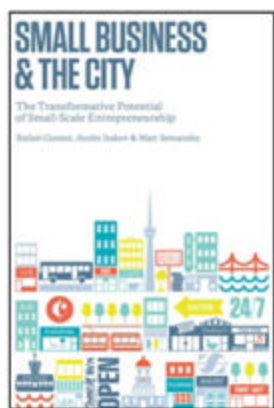
The surface, however, hides shadowy depths, where even Ted Wilson might find himself helplessly adrift. In the book's opening pages X relates how, in desperate search of enlightenment about why it is Jenn who feels humiliated by the ending of the relationship, he visits websites "dedicated to modern psychological advances" and, in particular, discussion sites where he might achieve wisdom through the shared experiences of others. What he finds, however, is a Babel ablaze with accusation, recrimination, and plain abuse that is, he confesses, frightening to behold. "Apparently the torch of knowledge, conserved through the ages by monks and scholars..., now was in the hands of an irresistible horde of arsonists."

The world, in short, has turned into one vast Dubai, a city of false wonders all at sea in a desert, where the dream of modern life has turned into a futuristic nightmare in which everything is bigger, taller, wider, deeper, richer than anything anywhere else, a place whose "blank past was a great 'story-telling' opportunity," as Ted Wilson, history scholar turned PR man, has it. X, who at the close will come to realize that he has no story to tell that is worth hearing or that will convince anyone of his authenticity and his worth, is shocked by the pass that matters have come to. Contemplating the essentially synthetic nature of the city he finds himself exiled in, he is filled with amazement and dismay at his own naivety.

I hadn't understood that it's no longer officially denied that history is cooked up. I'm fully aware that country branding is as old as Genesis, but have we become so despairing that we openly boast of our frauds on the facts? Jeepers creepers, whatever happened to lip service and the ceremony of innocence? Do we no longer require of our governors that at the very least they dissemble their motives and spare us, if nothing else, shame? Evidently not. Evidently we live in a world in which deep thinkers or investigative journalists are no longer required to bring to light the mechanisms by which our world, and our sense of it, is controlled. The controllers, like those buildings that wallow in their pipes and ducts, now jubilantly disclose their inner workings.

Jeepers creepers, indeed. □

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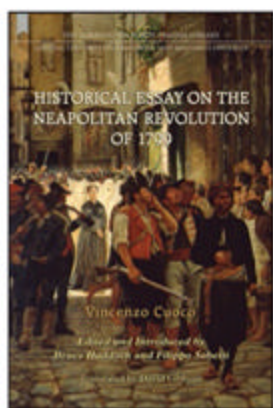


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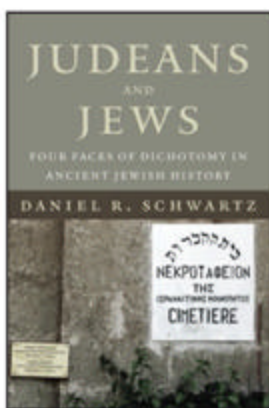
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The Road from Westphalia

Jessica Mathews

World Order

by Henry Kissinger.
Penguin, 420 pp., \$36.00

America in Retreat: The New Isolationism and the Coming Social Disorder

by Bret Stephens.
Sentinel, 269 pp., \$27.95

1.

Almost from the beginning of its history, America has struggled to find a balance in its foreign policy between narrowly promoting its own security and idealistically serving the interests of others; between, as we've tended to see it in shorthand, Teddy Roosevelt's big stick and the ideals of Woodrow Wilson. Just as consistently, the US has gone through periods of embracing a leading international role for itself and times when Americans have done all they could to turn their backs on the rest of the world.

Two new books now join this never-ending debate: Henry Kissinger's *World Order* and *America in Retreat* by Bret Stephens, a Pulitzer Prize-winning foreign affairs columnist for *The Wall Street Journal*. Both sound a call for more powerful and more engaged US leadership around the globe. Both Stephens and Kissinger appear to be worried about a return to isolationism, or at least a more inward-looking American policy, and are doing what they can to head it off. Both offer their own view of the relation between US interests and US values. Stephens's formula, roughly speaking, is 90 percent interests, 10 percent values, when convenient. Kissinger frames the debate more elegantly as one of power vs. principle, but he often comes down on both sides of the fence.

Beyond this, the books have little in common. Stephens's is a facts-bedamned polemic, designed to show that the world has gone to hell since President Obama took office. Somehow, Obama is saddled with responsibility for the success of North Korea's nuclear program. Stephens does not say that North Korea began the program in the 1950s, succeeded in building its first bomb twenty-two years ago, and carried out its first atomic test three years before Obama took office.

He also makes the serious charge that Russia has achieved "nuclear superiority over the United States via the [Obama administration's] New START Treaty." He does not acknowledge that today the US has many more deployed strategic launch vehicles than Russia, and that the two sides have equal numbers of warheads and launchers (including those not deployed). Moreover, the US arsenal is much more able to survive an attack than Russia's and is almost certainly far more lethal. His claim is baseless.

Yet to his credit, Stephens is explicit and unapologetic in defining what he thinks the posture of the US should be, namely the world's policeman or, as he describes it, a cop walking a global beat, "reassuring the good, deterring the tempted, punishing the wicked."

The metaphor fails because police are servants of the law. Without it, a policeman is merely a vigilante with no independent legitimacy. What Stephens describes is a world in which the US alone decides what behavior it considers unacceptable and rides out to punish it. To my knowledge, he is the only serious analyst ever to have explicitly advocated that the US act as the world's policeman.

By contrast, Kissinger's book, steeped in history, is a learned, thoughtful,



Henry Kissinger meeting with Zhou Enlai during his secret trip to China, July 1971

often fascinating global tour through the various clashing views of world order that are present today and go as far back as the fourth century BC. Its perspective throughout (even for events that occurred more than a millennium before the negotiators met) is the 1648 Treaty of Westphalia, which ended the Thirty Years' War. The book's center of gravity is eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Europe. Its heroes are "great statesmen," specifically Cardinal Richelieu, Klemens von Metternich, and Otto von Bismarck, about whom Kissinger has written admiringly for many years. They deserve the highest accolade because they had to

know where [their] strategy is leading and why...[and] act at the outer edge of the possible.... Because repetition of the familiar leads to stagnation, no little daring is required.

The book sheds much light on the past but has surprisingly little to say about the present or the future. Since no one alive has thought longer or harder about diplomacy or had more experience and success working at its highest level, it is disappointing that at age ninety-one Kissinger continues to keep his powder dry. He sets up the right questions, gives the political frame and the historical setting, but then does not share with us his answers to the tough choices the US and others currently face.

The recommendations for policy he does make are too few and far too general to be of much help. On Syria, a country now being destroyed, where a

human catastrophe is unfolding, all he offers is a description of the obvious: "If order cannot be achieved by consensus or imposed by force, it will be wrought, at disastrous and dehumanizing cost, from the experience of chaos." Surely a commentary on world order should provide greater insight into what to do about its worst breakdown in decades. Nor does Kissinger offer a word about the other great challenge to the post-war order, namely Vladimir Putin's snapping up of Crimea and his stealth invasion of Ukraine. Though the book discusses Asia's new leaders—Chinese

President Xi Jinping, Japan's leader Shinzo Abe, and Narendra Modi, India's just-elected prime minister—Putin, Russia's leader for fifteen years, is not mentioned except for one passing reference. After fifty pages on Islamism and the current troubles in the Middle East, Kissinger vaguely concludes:

The drift toward pan-regional sectarian confrontations must be deemed a threat to world stability.... The world awaits the distillation of a new regional order by America and other countries in a position to take a global view.

Is this really America's job, or within its power to effect? One wishes that this statement was the chapter's beginning, or at least its middle, not its last word.

2.

Since the US took on international leadership at the close of World War II, the debate over interests and values has become entangled with others that are importantly, if subtly, different. One is whether the US should usually choose to act alone, or try instead to achieve the greater legitimacy—and restrictions—that accompany multilateral action. Unilateralist views reached a new high in the George W. Bush administration. Those of John Bolton, briefly ambassador to the UN, were characteristic:

It's a big mistake for us to grant any validity to international law,

even when it may seem in our short-term interest to do so—because, over the long term, the goal of those who think that international law really means anything are those who want to constrict the United States.

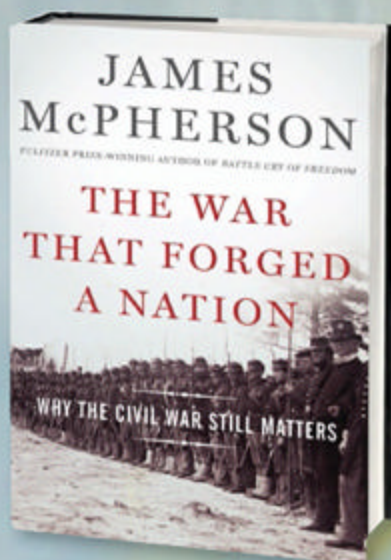
Setting aside the matter of legitimacy, even a cursory look at the vast body of international law developed over the past seventy-five years—from trade and banking to human rights and arms control—reveals how deeply American interests have been served by it.

Closely related to that debate is the argument over American exceptionalism. American contributions to international security, global economic growth, freedom, and human well-being have been so self-evidently unique and have been so clearly directed to others' benefit that Americans have long believed that the US amounts to a different kind of country. Where others push their national interests, the US tries to advance universal principles.

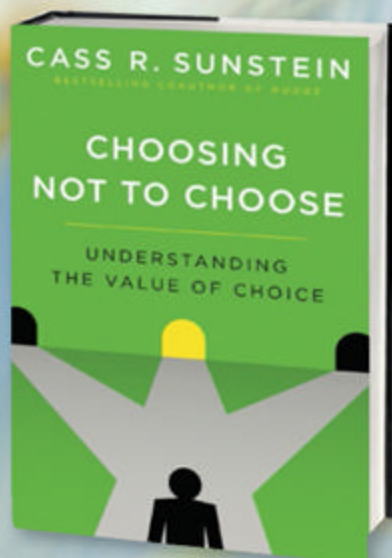
At its extreme, this reasoning holds that the US should not be bound by international rules, even those it has itself developed, but should occupy a position above the rest. In this view, it is in the world's interest, not merely the American interest, for the US to do so. A month after the attacks of September 11, 2001, Max Boot of *The Wall Street Journal* called on America to unambiguously "embrace its imperial role." "The organizing principle of empire," according to the like-minded Stephen Rosen in *The National Interest*, "rests on the existence of an overarching power that creates and enforces the principle of hierarchy, but is not itself bound by such rules."

Weaving together these and similar themes in *America in Retreat*, Stephens argues that the US must now shoulder the responsibility for establishing and maintaining a global Pax Americana. All the alternatives, including traditional balance of power and collective security, have been tried and failed. Americans "mainly want to be left alone," but instead have to "sharply increase military spending to upwards of 5 percent of GDP" (i.e., by a third or more from today's 3.8 percent); "once again start deploying forces globally in large numbers"; and be prepared to undertake "short, mission-specific, punitive police actions" around the globe.

The basis for such a drastic shift is his belief that international security is skidding downhill. The evidence suggests otherwise. The number of armed conflicts is down by more than one third since the end of the cold war. By 2008, high-intensity wars (i.e., those with an annual death toll of one thousand or more) were down by nearly 80 percent. Because most conflicts since the cold war have been within states rather than between them, the average war is costing one thousand battle deaths per year rather than the ten thousand average of the 1950s. This is not to diminish the seriousness of the many threats that abound today—conflagrations in the Middle East, the



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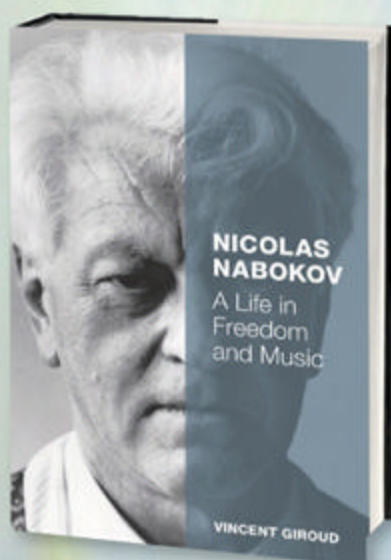


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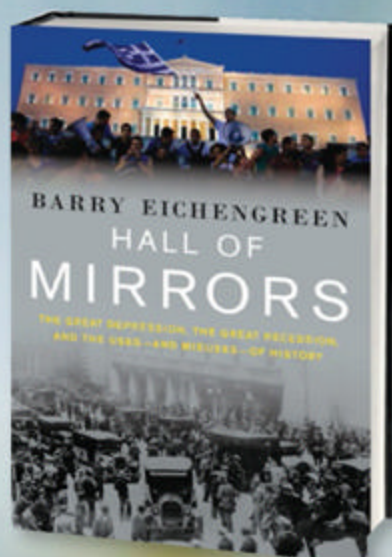
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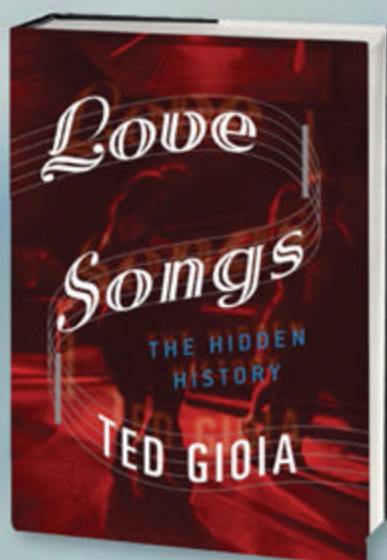
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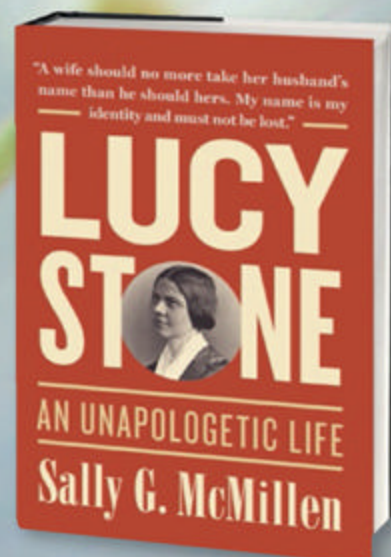
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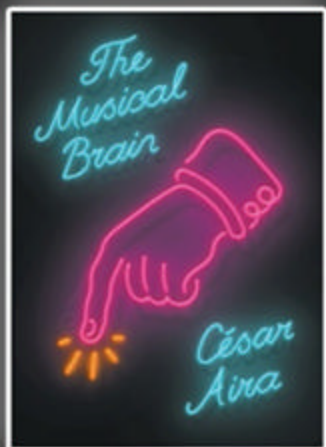


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conflict in Ukraine, the tensions in the East and South China Seas, Islamist terrorism, and Iran's nuclear program. But when there is saturation coverage, with video, of deaths by ones and tens, the overall impression of peace and war can be misleading.

Surprisingly, perhaps, recent years have also been ones of declining threat from weapons of mass destruction. There are now far fewer nuclear weapons in the world and fewer countries with nuclear programs than there were twenty years ago. During the last half-century, just four countries (Israel, India, Pakistan, and North Korea) acquired nuclear weapons: too many, but far fewer than experts dared hope for when the Nonproliferation Treaty was signed. Chemical weapons were banned in 1997. One hundred and ninety countries have agreed to be bound by that treaty and more than 80 percent of nations' declared stockpiles have been destroyed. It was because that widely accepted treaty existed that international action could be taken against Syrian President Bashar al-Assad following his use of chemical weapons. The US blundered badly through that episode, but in the end a strong precedent was established: use these weapons and you will lose them.

Where, then, does Stephens get his sense of impending doom? Discussing why American elites have periodic attacks of what he calls "declinism," he writes, neatly, that it is partly

the continuation of partisanship by other means—a handy way for those who are out of power to accuse those in it not only of bungling the job, but of putting the country on the road to ruin.

This is both true and an apt description of his own book.

The Pax Americana, Stephens writes, includes "freeloaders" who take advantage of American security guarantees and military spending and, worse, "freelancers, constantly taking unpredictable chances with their own security"—in other words, countries with the temerity to think that they have a right to their own foreign policy. In short, Stephens urges a fantastic construct: a global hegemony in which two hundred-odd nations calmly accept both one country's right to decide what is and isn't acceptable behavior and to accumulate, unopposed, a sufficient margin of power to enforce its rulings. Nothing like it has ever existed—or ever will.

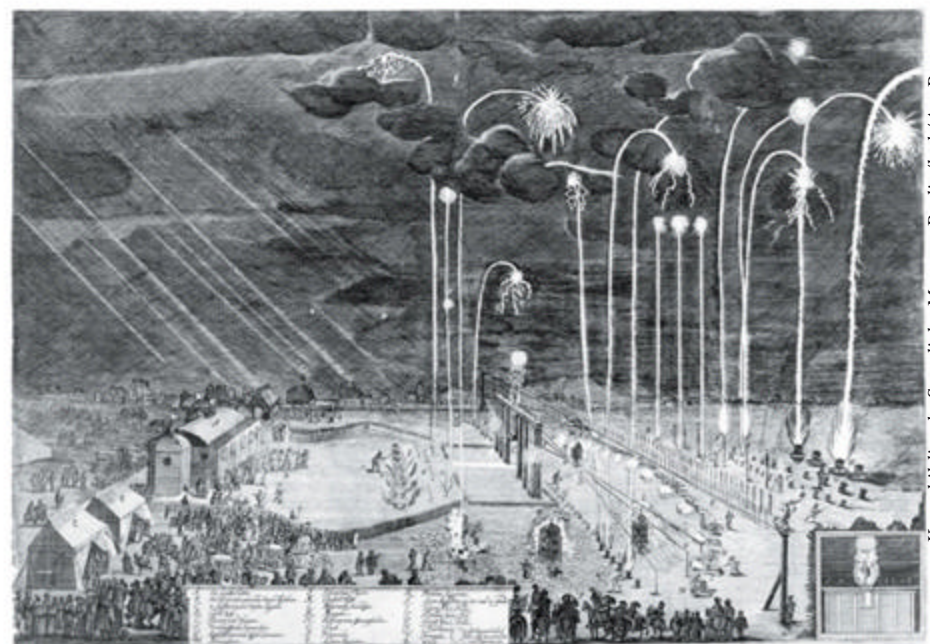
3.

Henry Kissinger's *World Order* is anything but ahistorical. It is actually two books folded together, a wide-ranging survey of the various conceptions of world order (there never has been a world order) and—building on Kissinger's portrayal of America's changeable international past—a call for US leadership in every region, lest a "vacuum" develop. His plea is that America recognize its "indispensable role" by at last "coming to terms with that role and with itself."

What we have now, "the sole generally recognized basis of what exists of a world order" and the central subject of this book, are the principles of state sovereignty that emerged from a series of negotiations in northern Germany

over 350 years ago. Kissinger describes the history of the Peace of Westphalia wonderfully, noting that the Holy Roman Empire alone was represented in those meetings by 178 separate participants from its various states.

From the mass of overlapping rulers—emperors, kings, dukes, popes, archbishops, guilds, cities, etc.—the Peace of Westphalia produced a solution of dazzling simplicity and longevity. The governing unit henceforth would be the state. Borders would be clearly defined and what went on inside those borders (especially the choice of religion) would be decided by its ruler and a matter of no one else's business. In modern terms, the delegates invented and codified state sovereignty, a single authority governing each territory and representing it outside its borders, no authority above states, and no outside



Fireworks in Nuremberg on June 4, 1650, celebrating the implementation of the Treaty of Westphalia; anonymous etching, seventeenth century

interference in states' domestic affairs.

From 1648 until at least the end of the cold war, power became concentrated steadily in the hands of states, though Westphalian principles were never universal. In a historical *tour d'horizon*, Kissinger traces the different challenges to the Westphalian system—from Russia under the tsars and later the USSR, Japan and China under their respective emperors, India in its pre-British history, and today the Islamic Republic of Iran (in which a state and a religion share sovereignty), and, finally, the Islamist forces that hope to substitute a religious caliphate for secular states. Nonetheless, Westphalia gave birth to international relations as we know them and to the balance of power among legally equal entities.

The historical argument is acute. But the book is weakened by attempting to force just about everything states do into this single frame. Iranian and American nuclear negotiators are in "a contest over the nature of world order." Even the EU, which as no one knows better than Kissinger is a historic rejection of Westphalian sovereignty in favor of something new,

can also be interpreted as Europe's return to the Westphalian international state system... this time as a regional, not a national, power, as a new unit in a now global version of the Westphalian system.

Though the EU has a high representative for foreign affairs and an External

Action Service, its members emphatically do not (and may never) represent themselves to the outside world as a single entity. National capitals take the lead.

Across the Atlantic, America's encounter with world order derived from its belief in its special destiny as the engine of human progress. Its history produced a society with, as Kissinger puts it, "congenital ambivalence" between the pursuit of moral principles and national interest. Teddy Roosevelt came close to a synthesis, Kissinger believes, and had he won reelection in 1912 "might have introduced America into the Westphalian system." By bringing America early into World War I he might have thereby changed the course of world history.

Instead, Woodrow Wilson took office, and was all too successful in connecting with what Americans have always wanted to believe about them-

selves. His genius was to "harness American idealism in the service of great foreign policy undertakings in peacemaking, human rights, and cooperative problem-solving," but his "tragedy" was to "bequeath to the twentieth century's decisive power an elevated foreign policy doctrine unmoored from a sense of history or geopolitics."

When Kissinger's account turns to recent and current events, serious weaknesses surface as he uses this analysis as the sole determinant of American foreign policy. The Iraq war, worthy of close examination because it was by far the greatest foreign policy blunder of recent decades, is wrongly portrayed as having been undertaken in pursuit of Bush's (Wilsonian) Freedom Agenda. While multiple arguments were made by various proponents of the war (ridding the world of a tyrant, bringing democracy to the Middle East, and even improving the chances for an Arab-Israeli peace), the overwhelming case made by the president and his team was that it was the necessary response to the direct threat of Saddam Hussein's weapons of mass destruction. National Security Adviser Condoleezza Rice's invocation of the "mushroom cloud" we might see if we did not act was not an offhand remark. The justification of the war as primarily a defense of freedom and democracy came *after* it turned out that WMDs were not present.

Kissinger's discussion of the war oscillates awkwardly between an effort

to justify it (and his contemporary support for it) and criticism of what the hardheaded Kissinger knows to have been a terribly unwise venture. “I supported the decision to undertake regime change in Iraq. I had doubts... about expanding it to nation building.” Kissinger has warm words for George W. Bush (“I want to express here my continuing respect and personal affection”) but immediately afterward notes that attempting to advance American values “by military occupation in a part of the world where they had no historical roots,” and expecting “fundamental change” overnight, was unrealistic.

Kissinger’s discussion of the war ends on a particularly weak note with the claim that it’s too soon to judge because the war may eventually be seen to have catalyzed the Arab Spring: “The advent of electoral politics in Iraq in 2004 almost certainly inspired demands for participatory institutions elsewhere in the region.” It is not too soon to know that this view is grasping at straws. The war was almost universally condemned by protest movements and opposition parties across the Arab world. The Iraqi political parties that emerged were largely sectarian, not national, offering exactly the wrong model to others, and in any case they were seen as American creations. Most Arabs saw the war then, as they do today, as an intrusion by the United States that on balance did no clear good and much harm.

The only current issue that *World Order* treats in depth is Iran’s nuclear program. Kissinger sums up masterfully the years of lying by Iran and

ineffective bargaining by the West during which Tehran used the time wasted in bad-faith negotiations to advance its nuclear program. He takes it for granted that nuclear weapons remain Iran’s goal and there are plenty of reasons to do so. But he neglects to mention that US intelligence concluded in 2007, and has reaffirmed twice since, that while Iran continued to enrich uranium in amounts beyond its civilian needs, it had abandoned its weapons program some years earlier.

In fact, we don’t know for certain whether Iran’s government is divided on this point, whether a “threshold” capability (i.e., the technology and fissile material to produce weapons on short notice, like Japan, for example) is the current goal, whether making actual weapons was once the goal and is no longer, or whether it has been the goal throughout. What we know for sure is that Iran has fastened on enrichment as the one thing it won’t give up—as the sign of its technological prowess and the measure of success in its confrontation with the West.

Also weakening his account is the absence of any mention of Iranian public opinion. In the election of 2013 one candidate campaigned explicitly for “an end to extremism” and “flexibility” in reaching a nuclear accommodation. Among six candidates, Hassan Rouhani won just over half of the vote with a 73 percent turnout. The Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Khamenei, is still the decider and he may not have changed his mind, but he is well aware now that a majority of his countrymen badly want an end to living as international outcasts. In ignoring this,

Kissinger goes too far in ruling out the possibility that there has been any significant change in Iranian policy. He warns—rightly—that Iran may simply be showing enough good faith to break the sanctions regime while retaining enough nuclear capability to turn it quickly into a weapons program later.

That is a real risk. But as an experienced strategist, Kissinger should have weighed it against the available alternatives. They are only three. One is to reach an imperfect (because it will be a compromise) deal that requires vigilance and enforcement; a second is to return to the cycle in which more sanctions are followed by more centrifuges, which has brought Iran this far; and the third is war. Any serious examination of the latter reveals costs that far outweigh the benefits of a few years’ delay in what would henceforth be an absolute Iranian determination to get the bomb.

World Order ends where it begins, portraying the American people as dangerously unable to balance national interests and the desire to advance universal values. Public opposition, he believes, hampered or prematurely ended four of the five wars America has fought since World War II (Korea, Vietnam, the Gulf War, Afghanistan, and Iraq). America’s record is a “tragedy.” It is a country

whose people have been prepared...to send its sons and daughters to remote corners of the world in defense of freedom but whose political system has not been able to muster the same unified and persistent purpose.

Americans are too prone to ignore the strategist’s “unsentimental analysis of underlying factors” (cf. the invasion of Iraq). At least in this telling, though, Kissinger’s own ambivalence is evident as well. What he never describes is what balance *he* would strike in specific tough cases that the US now faces. Without that, his call for change cannot do much to resolve the perennial ambivalence he deplors.

4.

Both these books deal with the core issues of geopolitics, of war and peace. Neither has much to say about economics, energy and other resources, demographic trends, human well-being, or environmental issues, especially the existential threat from climate change. Kissinger comments in his final pages on what he sees as the negative effects of the Internet and social networks in “destroying privacy” and diminishing “the strength to take lonely decisions.” But the geopolitical lens of his book focuses on where and how states compete. It has little to say either about the expanding groups of issues on which they must collaborate or about powerful, new, nonstate forces.

While the Westphalian system has shaped relations among states for three and a half centuries, and continues to do so, its reign has profoundly changed during just the past two to three decades. Borders, to put it simply, are not what they used to be. In 1648, nearly everything that mattered could be located within a fixed boundary—not so today. The trillions of dollars sloshing

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around in cyberspace, pollution, globalizing culture, international criminal networks, and the stressed global commons of oceans, air, and biodiversity are all changing the world profoundly. So are tightly knit but nongeographic communities of national diasporas,

ethnic groups and violent jihadists, corporations largely unmoored from any one country, and the gigantic global financial market—now almost twice as large as the global GDP.

These limits on global resources, porous borders, a globalizing culture

that both fragments and amalgamates, and growing requirements for states to work together for mutual well-being if not survival all mean that today's world order, and certainly tomorrow's, cannot be seen only as a matter of the distribution of state power or as a sys-

tem in which only states matter. The Westphalian order is not going away, but it is no longer what it once was. It's too soon to see what that system and the new forces will produce as they co-exist; but it's safe to say it won't look anything like the familiar past. □

Can They Crush Obamacare?

David Cole

Never underestimate the persistence of opponents of President Barack Obama's signature legislative achievement, the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act (ACA). Since the law was enacted in 2010, Republicans have introduced countless bills to repeal it, but have never had the votes to make their efforts anything but symbolic.

Having lost in the legislature, Obama's opponents—many of them the very same conservatives who have long decried judicial activism—turned to the courts. In 2012, they lost a constitutional challenge to the ACA, when Chief Justice John Roberts parted company with his conservative colleagues and wrote a majority opinion holding that Congress's power to impose and collect taxes authorized it to require individuals either to purchase health insurance or to pay a tax. The decision roiled the conservative movement, not least because of rumors that Roberts had initially voted to strike down the law, only to change his mind in the course of writing the opinion.

Now the Obamacare opponents are back before the Supreme Court again, advancing another challenge that, if successful, could spell the end of the ACA. *King v. Burwell*, or "Obamacare, Round 2," will be argued on March 4. It pits Michael Carvin, one of the lawyers who argued the first challenge, against Solicitor General Don Verrilli, who successfully defended the law. *Burwell* has received far less attention than the earlier case, in part because it makes no constitutional claims and presents only a question of statutory construction. But its implications could be just as momentous.

The lawsuit is being funded by the Competitive Enterprise Institute, whose board member and former chairman, Michael Greve, had this to say about the ACA at a conference in 2010:

This bastard has to be killed as a matter of political hygiene. I do not care how this is done, whether it's dismembered, whether we drive a stake through its heart, whether we tar and feather it and drive it out of town, whether we strangle it. I don't care who does it, whether it's some court someplace, or the United States Congress. Any which way, any dollar spent on that goal is worth spending, any brief filed toward that end is worth filing, any speech or panel contribution toward that end is of service to the United States.

The day that the Supreme Court rejected the constitutional challenge to the ACA, lawyers working with the CEI held a conference call about moving ahead with this new statutory claim.

This time, the law's opponents seize on a single phrase buried in a subclause

of the tax code that was amended by the ACA. They argue that it has the effect of denying to low- and middle-income taxpayers in thirty-four states the tax credits and subsidies designed to assist them in purchasing health insurance. Those thirty-four states elected to have the federal Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) create their insurance exchanges, rather than running the exchanges themselves, as the ACA expressly permitted. An exchange is essentially a state-specific market, generally accessed online, for individuals and small businesses to purchase health insurance.

The lawsuit contends that residents of these thirty-four states are ineligible for federal tax credits, which it argues are available only to those who purchase insurance on an exchange established by the state. An Urban Institute study reports that if the challengers prevail, approximately nine million Americans would lose almost \$29 billion in tax credits—an average of about \$3,000 per person. As the subsidies are available to individuals who earn between \$11,500 and \$46,680 a year, all of those affected would be poor or middle-income: they would include "day-care aides, waiters, bartenders and retail clerks...the self-employed...[and] early retirees."¹

¹Linda J. Blumberg et al., "The Implications of a Supreme Court Finding for the Plaintiff in *King v. Burwell*: 8.2 Million More Uninsured and 35%



A Tea Party protester on the West Lawn of the White House, Washington D.C., September 2013

And the insurance markets in these states would then be destroyed, because many people would no longer be able to afford insurance, which would reduce the pool of persons covered and increase the cost of insurance for all state residents to prohibitive levels.

The challengers' statutory argument is deceptively simple. A subclause of the tax code setting forth a formula for calculating federal income tax credits provides that the amount of the credit depends on the number of months the taxpayer has been enrolled in a health insurance plan purchased on an insurance exchange "established by the State." Since an exchange established by the federal HHS is not an exchange "established by the State," they maintain, the law precludes subsidies for all residents of the thirty-four states that have exchanges created by HHS. The government counters that "exchange established by the State" is a legal term of art, and when read in conjunction with other parts of the ACA, it encompasses both exchanges that states them-

Higher Premiums" (Urban Institute, January 2015). For a powerful account of the real people who stand to lose their insurance benefits if the lawsuit prevails, see Lena H. Sun and Niraj Chokshi, "Millions at Risk of Losing Coverage as Justices Take Up Challenge to Obamacare," *The Washington Post*, February 16, 2015.

selves established, as well as exchanges that the states chose to have HHS create for them in their respective states.

The challengers do not dispute that, were the Court to adopt their reading, the insurance markets would fail in two thirds of the states. (Indeed, that is their hope, as it would mark the end, albeit a painful and ugly one, of Obamacare.)

The challengers insist, however, that courts must enforce the plain meaning of the statute's terms, and cannot rewrite them to serve some larger general purpose, such as providing affordable health care to "all Americans," the expressly stated purpose of the ACA. They cast the case as "extraordinarily straightforward": an exchange established by HHS is not an exchange established by the state.

At first glance, this argument might well be thought to appeal to the Court's five conservative justices. After all, four of them—Justices Anthony Kennedy, Antonin Scalia, Clarence Thomas, and Samuel Alito—are already on record as believing that the ACA is unconstitutional. And as a methodological matter, the conservative justices tend to favor "textualism" or "strict construction" over more open-ended, or "purposive," methods of interpretation. Thus, this challenge appeals to a conservative doctrine of statutory interpretation to attack a statute that conservatives already find troubling for other reasons.

When the Court agreed to hear the current case in November 2014, without waiting to see if the lower courts divided on the question, some observers saw this as a sign that the conservative justices were reaching out to avenge their "loss" in the first ACA case. In *The New York Times*, Linda Greenhouse wrote that the grant of review was more troubling than *Bush v. Gore*, in which the Court effectively called the 2000 election for George W. Bush.

So is the ACA doomed? I don't think so. First of all, the Court's decision to hear the case is not necessarily a sign that it will agree with the challengers. There is a strong prudential reason for hearing the case as soon as possible: the ACA is a huge and complicated program, and millions of people are relying on it for their health insurance. Whether the end result of this case is that millions of Americans are deemed eligible or ineligible for the act's federal subsidies, it's surely better to resolve that question sooner rather than later. And the challengers, who had already filed multiple cases, could be counted upon to keep filing until they prevailed in some court of appeals. Had the Court stayed its hand, it would have left doubts about the validity of the law for years to come. Under the circumstances, the grant of review is not a sign of overreaching by the Court, or that the challengers will prevail.

Second, the challengers' argument loses its superficial appeal—and becomes decidedly anticonservative—as soon as one looks beyond the single phrase they focus upon, and considers how that phrase is understood in the context of the statute as a whole. Even the most conservative “textualists” agree that the judge’s job is, as the Court has said, to discern “the plain meaning of the whole statute, not of isolated sentences.”² Justice Scalia, the high priest of textualism, has advised that “in textual interpretation, context is everything.”³ Or as one of America’s greatest jurists, Learned Hand, once warned, “Sterile literalism . . . loses sight of the forest for the trees.”⁴

The challengers in *King v. Burwell* have indeed lost sight of the forest for the trees. It is a cardinal rule of statutory interpretation that statutes should not be interpreted to achieve absurd ends, yet that is precisely what the challengers’ reading would produce. If their interpretation of the single phrase they rely upon is correct, many other sections of the statute would make no sense at all, and indeed the HHS exchanges that Congress expressly authorized would be doomed to fail.

If the challengers’ view were correct, the HHS exchanges would have no one to sell insurance to, and no insurance to sell. Because the ACA defines an individual “qualified” to purchase insurance from an exchange as one who “resides in the State that established the Exchange,” exchanges created by HHS would have no eligible customers. And because the law similarly defines “qualified” health plans that can be sold through the exchange, the HHS exchanges would have no health plans to sell. The exchanges would be empty shells serving no one.

Moreover, even if these problems could somehow be finessed, the HHS exchanges would be doomed from the outset. The ACA rests on three pillars. It (1) prohibits insurance companies from discriminating on the basis of preexisting conditions, (2) mandates that all persons who can afford to do so must purchase insurance or pay a tax, and (3) provides subsidies to the many people who could not otherwise afford insurance. All three pillars are necessary for the ACA to work.

In the 1990s, several states prohibited insurance companies from discriminating on the basis of preexisting conditions without mandating the purchase of insurance or subsidizing those who could not afford it. In each instance, the result was a “death spiral” in which insurance became prohibitively expensive, and the insurance markets collapsed. Healthy people could and did rely on the nondiscrimination rule to wait to purchase insurance until they were ill. The pool of insured was then dominated by the elderly and the sick, and without a larger pool to share the risks and costs, insurance companies had to raise prices for everyone. That, in turn, meant fewer

people could afford insurance, which reduced the numbers sharing the risk still further, and caused insurance fees to rise still higher. So Congress knew that the only way to achieve a working insurance market with a nondiscrimination rule was to ensure broad participation through the individual mandate and tax subsidies.

It would have made no sense for Congress to give states the choice to allow HHS to create exchanges for them, but then deny to all customers of those exchanges the subsidies necessary to make the market work. If “exchange established by the State” is read, by contrast, as the federal government contends, to include exchanges in states that elected to have HHS create their exchanges for them, none of these absurd results obtain, and the scheme operates, as intended, to provide health insurance to “all Americans.”

In search of a rationale that might explain their interpretation, the challengers posit that Congress was trying to encourage states to create their own exchanges by penalizing them if they did not—even though not a single member of Congress suggested as much, and even though the states themselves did not foresee that result. It is not uncommon for the federal government to condition grants to states on their engaging in certain types of activity, and the challengers argue this is simply an instance of such “conditional spending.” But there are several problems with this argument.

First, if Congress was indeed seeking to impose a condition on the states, this was a peculiar and impermissible way to do so. Under a constitutional doctrine designed to protect the states, the Court has said that when Congress seeks to impose conditions on states, it must do so “unambiguously,” so that the states have clear notice of the implications.⁵ If there is any ambiguity, therefore, the statute is to be read as not imposing a condition on the states. Here, the challengers would have the court ignore that doctrine and instead treat the statute as a game of “gotcha,” relying on a few obscure words buried in a subclause of the tax code directed not to states at all, but to individuals as federal citizens, concerning the computation of their federal taxes. Indeed, when Jonathan Adler and Michael Cannon, two of the architects of this legal challenge, first wrote about the issue in *The Wall Street Journal*, they characterized the statutory language as a “glitch.”⁶ That is not how Congress imposes conditions on the states.

Second, Congress set forth the option for HHS to establish an exchange for the state in a provision entitled “State Flexibility Relating to Exchanges.” That provision nowhere even intimates that if a state were to take advantage of this “flexibility,” its residents would lose their eligibility for tax benefits, and the state’s insurance market would be destroyed. The challengers’ interpretation would transform a provision designated as offering states “flexibility” into a coercive threat to punish the states’ residents.

Third, a friend of the court brief filed by twenty-two of the states that exercised their “flexibility” to allow HHS to establish an exchange observes that the states themselves never saw this coming. They expended considerable resources studying how best to implement the ACA, yet “conspicuously absent from the Amici States’ deliberations was any notion that choosing an [HHS exchange] would deprive citizens of tax credits.”

At best, then, the meaning of an exchange “established by the State” is ambiguous. Taken on its own, and ripped from the context of the statute as a whole, the reference to the “state” might well be understood to preclude HHS exchanges. But when read in context with other provisions that define the exchanges, their duties, and their purposes, the phrase can only be understood as a legal shorthand that includes both exchanges established by the states themselves and exchanges established for the states by HHS at the state’s election. Where a statute is ambiguous, another doctrine long favored by conservatives requires the courts to defer to the interpretation of the executive agency charged with implementing it. In this instance, the IRS has issued regulations that interpret the tax code provision in question as authorizing tax credits to customers using HHS exchanges. If there is any ambiguity at all, the Court must defer to that judgment.

As Michael Greve’s quote above illustrates, the intentions of the law’s opponents are clear. They want to kill Obamacare. In theory, a statutory decision by the Court could be fixed by Congress amending the ACA, or by the

states establishing their own exchanges. But as Michael Cannon gleefully told an audience at Georgetown University Law Center on February 11, 2015, political opposition will ensure that no such fix is possible, at the federal or state level. The fate of the law turns, therefore, on the Supreme Court’s interpretation of “established by the State.”

The challengers have sought to portray their case as based on conservative ideals. That is a ruse. To rule in their favor would in fact require the Court’s conservative justices to abandon three fundamental, and ultimately conservative, legal principles—that courts must interpret statutes to give meaning to the whole; that states’ rights concerns require Congress to be unambiguous when it imposes conditions on the states; and that courts should defer to agencies in the interpretation of the statutes that they implement. Instead, the challengers would have the Court adopt an interpretation, focused on four words wrenched out of context, that produces absurd results, imposes a highly coercive condition on states virtually by subterfuge, and overrides the plainly reasonable interpretation adopted by the IRS.

But perhaps the least conservative aspect of a ruling in the challengers’ favor would be its result—it would radically upend the status quo, and would mark the first time in the Court’s history that it issued a decision taking tax benefits away from millions of poor and middle-class Americans. It is of course possible that partisan opposition to Obamacare will drive the Court’s conservative justices to reach such an anticonservative result. But if they do, they will be acting contrary to their own principles. □

²*Beecham v. United States*, 511 U.S. 368, 372 (1994).

³Antonin Scalia, *A Matter of Interpretation: Federal Courts and the Law* (Princeton University Press, 1997), p. 37.

⁴*New York Trust Co. v. Commissioner of Internal Revenue*, 68 F.2d 19, 20 (2d Cir. 1933).

⁵*Pennhurst State School and Hospital v. Halderman*, 451 U.S. 1, 17 (1981).

⁶Jonathan H. Adler and Michael F. Cannon, “Another ObamaCare Glitch,” *The Wall Street Journal*, November 16, 2011.

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Dark Victory at the Met

Geoffrey O'Brien

Iolanta
an opera by Peter Tchaikovsky.

Bluebeard's Castle
an opera by Béla Bartók.
A double bill at the Metropolitan Opera, New York City,
January 26–February 21, 2015

It was a bold idea to stage Tchaikovsky's *Iolanta* and Bartók's *Bluebeard's Castle* in a single evening. The length of the performance is not daunting—little more than three hours—but the juxtaposition of the two works leads to a bracing sort of dissonance. However closely they might be brought together through directorial conception, a fine frisson of incompatibility kept them vibrating in separate spheres. By the time *Iolanta* had reached its final resounding chorus in praise of God's blessings (even if the chorus's black uniforms and white aprons did make them look a bit like the waitstaff of a high-end mountain resort), it was almost inconceivable that in a few minutes we would be injected into *Bluebeard's* dark and splintered labyrinth.

Having communed, in *Iolanta*, with the vulnerability of a blind princess sequestered from the world—taking part in her passage through stages of confusion and sorrow toward a jubilant if painful passage into light—it is jarring to be dropped down into the vulnerability of *Bluebeard's* new lover Judith as she arrives at the threshold of his windowless castle with its dripping walls. The danger overcome in the first work returns, this time without hope of getting past it. If Tchaikovsky's music moves upward and outward, out of pity toward reconciliation, Bartók's charts an uninterrupted spiraling course, inward and downward toward fearful acknowledgment. To go from one to the other requires a rapid readjustment of the nervous system.

Different as they are, the two operas can certainly be linked in many ways. To experience them side by side becomes an exercise in discerning just how many such connections there might be. As the Met's program notes point out, they were written only twenty years apart. Both are fairy tales self-consciously transmuted into symbolist allegories; both center on a woman kept in ignorance by a powerful man and striving to learn the truth.

The blind *Iolanta* (Anna Netrebko) is kept away from the world by her father King René (Ilya Bannik), waited on by servants forbidden to let her know not only that she is blind but even that such things as blindness and vision exist, until a wandering huntsman breaks the spell of unknowing and leads her toward the recovery of sight. Bartók's Judith (Nadja Michael), having abandoned family and friends to go away with Duke Bluebeard (Mikhail Petrenko) despite the evil rumors surrounding him, insists on seeing all the seven locked rooms of his castle, wearing down his resistance to handing her the keys, until on opening the last door she finds herself condemned to eternal night along with his other wives, preserved in the secret chamber like the living dead.

Mariusz Treliński, the Polish director whose first Met production this is, has found intricate devices for framing the operas as parallel worlds that might well be the same world seen under different aspects. He has aimed to flavor the fairy-tale timelessness of the librettos (*Iolanta* is ostensibly set in a fanciful version of fifteenth-century France, *Bluebeard's Castle* in what, according to its opening recitation, could be the mind's interior) with visual motifs from 1940s Hollywood. His King René wears jackboots that would befit a Nazi officer in one of Fritz Lang's



Nadja Michael as Judith and Mikhail Petrenko as Bluebeard
in Béla Bartók's *Bluebeard's Castle* at the Metropolitan Opera, 2015

wartime films; Judith and Bluebeard are dressed along the elegant lines of Joan Fontaine and Laurence Olivier in Hitchcock's *Rebecca* (cited by the director as a point of reference).

Treliński overlays certain visual motifs across both operas—white flowers, blue dresses, necklaces, uprooted trees that rise and descend—not to mention the baronial wall display of antlered stag heads that recurs in both, related presumably to the most disconcerting touch of all: the giant deer that emerges at the side of the stage at the beginning of *Iolanta*. This hologram Bambi collapses into nothingness, to be followed by a succession of video-projected deer racing across the field of vision through the opening bars of the music, a drifting prelude that seems designed to express that cloud of unshaped yearnings into which the princess is just waking. Hovering and unassertive, it reaches for something like the sound of her blindness.

Iolanta was Tchaikovsky's last opera—composed in 1891–1892 in tandem with *The Nutcracker*—and has never been done at the Met before. It is a curious work whose lyrical core is surrounded by a good deal of peripheral exposition and explanation; its shape might be said to mirror the surging of *Iolanta's* discontent against the confining limits of her world. Her arias represent a series of increasingly forceful efforts to

break through a wall that she does not even know exists, and the culminating scene is a long central duet in which the stranger Vaudémont (Piotr Beczala), not yet realizing her blindness, is bewildered as she repeatedly hands him a white rose instead of the red one he asked for.

In the Met production *Iolanta* in her crisis of incomprehension knocks over a table and the scene is plunged into darkness, as her blindness is in effect for a moment made visible—the crisis being followed by an ecstatic love scene in which, musically at least, all barriers

oner; the metaphysical discourse on flesh and spirit by the Moorish physician Ibn-Hakia (Elchin Azizov), who has the skill to restore her vision only on the condition that she acknowledge her blindness; the ringing back-to-back arias of Vaudémont and his jovial companion Robert (Aleksei Markov), both of which evoked roars of approval on opening night. (That response seemed to break the somewhat unfocused aura that had until that point hovered around the performance both of the singers and the orchestra under Valery Gergiev's direction.)

All that, however, would not add up to any kind of drama without the figure of *Iolanta*, at the outset as confined and helpless a heroine as could be imagined, not even able to conceive of what is troubling her, surrounded by a solicitous household staff whom she regards as loving friends even though (in this production) some of them look at her with the amused condescension of hired help dealing with a basket case. The Gothic pavilion that the libretto identifies as her place of confinement is here turned into a rudimentary sort of hunting lodge (hence those antlers on the wall), and *Iolanta* in her white nightdress seems less the pampered daughter of an indulgent king and more an embarrassing offspring subjected to some antiquated mode of psychiatric treatment.

The real action of the opera is her gradual recognition of the inchoate sadness that finally forces her to rebel against the soothing nurses assuring her that everything is all right. Anna Netrebko, in an opera that she has long championed, was not in as good voice as on her recently released recording of the opera. But if her tone seemed forced at times, she did fully convey the inarticulate desperation in everything *Iolanta* sings. There was nothing allegorical about the way she stumbled disoriented around the room or came up against the wall as if it marked the edge of her own grasp of things. Her isolation ward is set on a revolving stage and as the opera progresses is stripped of its furnishings, while lighting effects make it seem progressively smaller. Surrounding that hermetic chamber are forest and mountains restlessly transformed by cycles of light and darkness, filled out with layers of rock and vegetation by complicated video projections, a natural world from which the room in the center remains cut off.

When *Iolanta* finally is able to see, thanks to a swift operation performed out of audience view—the staging could not conceal just how hurriedly the opera manages this wrap-up—she emerges into the glare momentarily dazed, finding the light painful, unable to recognize anyone or anything, still unattached to the world. It feels like more of a real ending than the joyful chorale that follows, in which *Iolanta's* particular case is submerged in a general hymn of praise. The individual drama is left where it was, slightly off balance, with *Iolanta* trying to get a sense of where the room exists in relation to the rest of the world, and who the people are who cluster around her as if she were a potentially dangerous crea-

Mary Solhl/Metropolitan Opera

ture suddenly set loose. As Iolanta goes off with her lover, Trelinski chooses to linger on the figure of her father in his military garb, her possessively loving jailer now left to his solitude.

At the first performance a protester made his way to the stage during the curtain call and displayed (as near as could be determined at a distance) a mocking poster of Putin as Hitler, flanked by images of Gergiev and Netrebko, before apparently being taken into custody in the wings. The interruption—with its reminder of Ukraine and the opposition that continues to greet Gergiev and Netrebko for their strong support of Putin—provided a quick blast of real-life clamor between these two operatic dream worlds. When the performance resumed with *Bluebeard's Castle*, Gergiev and the orchestra seemed palpably energized. Bartók's work is as much symphonic poem as opera and from its opening chords sets in motion an inexorable mechanism allowing for no pause or relaxation of attention until it is played out.

Staging, even on this production's level of visual elaboration, is almost beside the point. The interpenetration of the words of the Hungarian librettist Béla Balázs and Bartók's music, as realized by two singers on an empty stage, would already contain mise-en-scène enough. I don't know if there is another opera so rigorously compressed and pared down. Its hour's duration is a continuous unfolding that seems to have begun even before we have started listening, and that in its ending leaves the impression of a permanent silence—the “midnight” that is the last word sung—in which all that treasury of sound has been sealed up and buried.

The spine of it is of stark simplicity. There is a man, Bluebeard, a woman, Judith, and a castle with seven doors to be opened one by one. Such simplicity allows for a constantly shifting and exfoliating sonic density without the architecture ever being lost sight of. The music keeps finding new layers of lyric beauty—a beauty entirely devoid of anything soothing or heartening or uplifting, yet irresistible by texture alone, the ear being led deeper into previously unheard sonorities as variously colored as the rooms that Judith enters—even as the drama burrows deeper into inescapable dread and claustrophobia.

Balázs doubtless had many models in mind—Poe's necrophiliac tales, the dream plays of Strindberg and Maeterlinck, the perverse pseudobiblical poeticism of Wilde's *Salome*—but he distilled them into a libretto that has the almost childlike feel of a bloody folk ballad about a demon lover. Its meters echo a nursery rhyme along the lines of “Mary, Mary, quite contrary,” and its repetitive patterns of question and answer are as hypnotic as some ancient half-understood liturgy. A self-consciously sophisticated product of the age of Freud and Schnitzler and Klimt, it yet retains its link with the tale's ancient origins. If *Iolanta* without its music feels like a concocted fairy tale, the libretto of *Bluebeard's Castle* provides an opening for what Bartók's music would more thoroughly set loose: the troubling force of deep folklore.

Balázs carefully preserved the open-endedness of the story. The spoken recitation that precedes the opera asks but

does not answer the question of where it takes place, outside us or inside us. We are left with the clear possibility that as a genuine mind-opera, it cannot be said to take place anywhere—that Bluebeard's castle is the opera itself, the orchestral sounds not merely a description of the castle's interior but its very walls and passageways, built out of vibrations. Bluebeard and Judith would then both alike be trapped within it, coiled around each other in a dance of death driven by desire and curiosity.

In the course of an hour the awareness sinks in that this is an opera without real action, that in some sense no one does anything other than submit to the inevitable even when seeming most violently engaged. The man and woman drown in themselves and in each other. The orchestra is finally

manding the same kind of material resources. Filming on a studio set with a great deal of netting and painted backdrops, and with the singers lip-synching to a previously recorded performance, Powell succeeded in making something equally expressive as film and opera, staying close to the singers as he tracks them in sinuous patterns to suggest precisely a dance of entrapment. With its saturated colors and flagrantly unreal settings Powell's film achieves the tone of a disturbingly intrusive dream, and incidentally confirms the narrative sharpness of Balázs's libretto, which functions perfectly as the most unwaveringly focused horror movie script.

The movie-ish feel of Trelinski's staging was amplified by video effects even more elaborate than those in *Iolanta*. There is a vast graphic sketch



Anna Netrebko as Iolanta in Peter Tchaikovsky's *Iolanta* at the Metropolitan Opera, 2015

the decisive character, and at the Met Gergiev provides an opportunity to experience the full force of Bartók's overwhelming score.

The spareness of the tale's shape invites multiple readings. Trelinski's production was an exercise in multiplicity, even at the risk of overcomplication. The *Rebecca* mood that he has said was his point of departure—Bluebeard and Judith arrive at the castle like Maxim de Winter and his bride at Manderley, impeccably tuxedoed and gowned, with the headlights of their car gleaming through the mist—is not so remote a choice. The Gothic strain of 1940s cinema does indeed reach back to the same roots that Balázs and Bartók drew on. One thinks of Fritz Lang's Freudian melodrama *Secret Beyond the Door* (1948)—the title alone seems like a deliberate allusion—with its landscape of fog and shadows and its trance-like air of morbid repetition compulsion. There are certainly moments in *Bluebeard's Castle* that inevitably invoke the movies because one can hear how successfully Hollywood composers plundered the score for chord changes and moody coloration.

The cinematic associations of the opera have been explored before by Michael Powell in his 1963 film version, a work very much in the vein of his earlier *The Red Shoes* and *The Tales of Hoffmann*, although far from com-

of an elevator shaft like something out of *Metropolis*; there are a multitude of separate enclosed spaces—a kitchen (well supplied with butcher knives, to represent the libretto's armory), a tiled bathroom (as the setting for the “lake of tears” in the sixth chamber)—that create the equivalent of cross-cutting between different locations in a castle more reminiscent in its modern fixtures and bright colors of the Overlook Hotel in Kubrick's *The Shining* than of Hitchcock's *Manderley*. (The bloodied woman who materializes as Judith bathes in a luxurious bathtub might be a direct Kubrick quote.) The blindfold worn by Judith during her first initiation into the castle, aside from linking up with the blindness of Iolanta, also suggested the erotic rituals of the château in *The Story of O*.

The century since *Bluebeard's Castle* was created (composed in 1911, it was first performed in a revised version in 1918) has certainly not been slack in embroidering on the themes of the demonic husband and the endangered wife, or in filling out more explicitly the themes of dominance and subjugation that pervade the opera. At moments the Met production seems like a foot-noted edition, appending relevant bits of cultural history to the libretto's skeletal structure.

Nadja Michael and Mikhail Petrenko were both splendid if not quite evenly

matched. Her Judith exuded a flexible power that seemed quite capable of subduing his more opaque Bluebeard at more than one point, despite eruptions of violence like his knocking her to the floor several times. At moments Bluebeard began to seem a waxworks figure of menace come to life, an ominous foil to the central drama of Judith. Judith is of course aggressive; her insistent questioning, here as in the original fairy tale, is what drives the action forward. Yet the movement of the dialogue establishes a constant unstable pushing and pulling, a slippery shifting of the balance between them. If Bluebeard finally prevails, it is only after repeated attempts on his part to save Judith from himself.

At the Met they are not always on stage together, which has the effect of breaking up what is in fact an uninterrupted duet—uninterrupted although fractured, since they never sing together until the last moment, by which time any sense of loving union has gone adrift. There is an epic amplitude in Trelinski's staging—a sense of free rummaging in the attic and basement rooms of the mind—but it loses some of that sense of a tightly knit dance of seduction and retreat, of boundaries progressively intruded on from both sides, of fear and reluctance felt by each at different times. However one reads the relation of Bluebeard and Judith, there is no doubt that they are bound together from the beginning, the only question being the nature of the bond.

The horror movie apparatus is true to the opera's overlay of lurid fairground Punch and Judy show. This is after all the story of Bluebeard; hard for it not to be about a psycho killer and his victim. Bluebeard and Judith are in some sense puppets caught in the structure of an old ballad, counting off the ritual steps leading to the stanza that will end it all. The old story (which in Perrault's version had a happy ending) was a familiar parable about the perils of female curiosity. Balázs's retelling was, in the words of Zoltán Kodály (for whom the libretto was originally intended), an expression of “the eternal insolubility of the man/woman problem.”

Yet as reimagined by Bartók the beauty of the opera is in the force with which each of them, at every moment, pushes back against being enclosed or defined. Questions provoke further questions. Between the notes are emotional abysses. Up until the last, nothing is settled, no identity is fixed, no choice is final. The life of the opera consists of the struggle to avoid that final definition. Its inevitability is nonetheless signaled by the grieving that seeps into all the otherwise gorgeous and divertingly various music, like the blood that Judith finds among the flowers and jewels.

No single production can do more than light up certain facets of *Bluebeard's Castle's* shifting moods and contradictory identities. The work seems designed to fiercely resist a definitive reading of its motives. It induces if anything a sense of complicity in the spectator, of intimate involvement at a decidedly entranced and irrational level. Trelinski and Gergiev inhabit that level with a full appreciation of its beauty and strangeness, and the final emotional effect is lingering and devastating. To register that only an hour has passed is not the least strange part of it. □

2016: The Republicans Write

Michael Tomasky

In any given presidential campaign, there exists what we might call an “issues palette”—an underlying set of public concerns that seems likely to end up being what the race is fundamentally about. To take three obvious examples: the 1932 election was about the Depression; the 1980 campaign focused on stagflation, the Iranian hostage crisis, and the larger questions of statist failure; the 2008 campaign, from September 15 onward, hinged on the economic meltdown and its dangers.

The important point about these issues palettes is that they always tend to favor one party or the other, for the obvious historical reason that our two parties are associated in the public mind with particular sets of issues, and each is seen by most voters as good at certain things and bad at other things. If terrorism or deficit reduction is the top electoral preoccupation, the tilt will be toward the Republicans. If an election ends up turning on protecting Social Security and Medicare, that should favor the Democrats. (The condition of the economy underlies everything else, and the incumbent party is typically rewarded or punished based on its strength or weakness.)

So here we are, in the protean stages of the 2016 campaign, and already it seems that we can say, with all the requisite qualifiers, that the issues palette should be reasonably favorable to the Democrats. As matters are shaping up so far, the sense of many people I speak to is that the election appears destined to be about the condition of the middle class, the issue of wage stagnation, and the recognition (finally) that the American economy has been working far better for those at the top than for those in the middle or, obviously, on the bottom.

The salient basic numbers are these. Since 1979, compensation for the top 1 percent has grown 138 percent, while median wages have increased just 6.1 percent. Worker productivity has grown 63.5 percent in this time, and if wages had kept pace with productivity, the annual median wage today, instead of being around \$35,300, would be \$54,400.

All this has been known for a long time, and groups like the liberal Economic Policy Institute have produced dozens of papers documenting the problem. But middle-class wage stagnation, and the inequality that has resulted as compensation at the top has surged, has never been the central economic preoccupation of Washington. It is becoming so now.

This is happening for a number of reasons, some of which have percolated up by design, others by accident. Certainly, President Obama has taken up the theme of middle-class incomes with considerable energy. Various Democratic-minded think tanks in Washington push the notion as well. The Center for American Progress, argu-

Jeb Bush and Scott Walker



ably the most influential of these groups, released in January a major report on “Inclusive Prosperity”¹ that recommended a range of policies—increased profit sharing, greater bargaining power for workers, vastly more infrastructure investment—to bring the have-nots closer to the haves. The real significance of this report was that the commission that drafted it was co-chaired by Larry Summers, whose endorsement of these ideas might make them more politically palatable to Hillary Clinton.

¹The report can be found at www.americanprogress.org.

So there is some coordination here, but mainly, it’s just the way the cards are tumbling. However prematurely, Washington seems to have agreed, around the arrival of the New Year, that the recovery is on and that we have entered a new economic phase. A new phase brings a new set of questions, and the one being asked most insistently these days is: Yes, all the indicators are positive, except wages, where growth has remained sluggish. What are we going to do about that?

We have entered this phase just as the presidential campaign has begun to take

shape, which forces the candidates to present their bona fides on the question. This was demonstrated most conspicuously by Mitt Romney during his three-week flirtation with a third run.

The man who could never shake his comments about the “47 percent” back in 2012 was clearly seeking this time to position himself as the tribune of the 99 percent if he ran. “We need to restore opportunity, particularly for the middle class. And that will soon include you,” Romney said in a speech to students at Mississippi State University on January 28. “You deserve a job that can repay all you’ve spent and borrowed to go to college.”

Then, in early February, in his first big policy speech, Jeb Bush emphasized the “opportunity gap,” telling the Detroit Economic Club that “only a small portion of the country [is] riding the up escalator.” Median incomes are down, he said, and “households are, on average, poorer.” In Romney’s absence, Bush has become the instant front-runner among the candidates representing the establishment wing of the party, and the big money will likely coalesce around him and his message, at least to the extent to which conservative plutocrats can bear to do so.

On the evidence of his February 18 speech to the Chicago Council on Global Affairs, Bush’s foreign policy will not differ dramatically from his brother’s. Rhetorically, Bush tries to sound more like his realist, cautious father. But the substance of his policy positions puts him closer to George W. (the phrase “take them out” when applied to the Islamic State can mean only a ground war, although he’s not likely to admit to that). And he is surrounding himself with some of his brother’s key advisers—most surprisingly Paul Wolfowitz, the intellectual architect of the disastrous Iraq intervention.

The odd thing is that Bush polls no better against Clinton than several of the other candidates; so he is the front-runner in the financial sense, but no other. His politics are basically conservative, which is reflected by his record as governor of Florida on issues from education to privatization to his lamentable handling of the Terri Schiavo case, when he defied all medical expertise and advice to pander to a right wing that believes in preserving “life” in all situations.

But, surely aware that staking out nothing but those kinds of positions makes a Republican unelectable, Bush began a couple of years ago to present himself as more moderate, on immigration and supporting the “Common Core” learning standards and, now, on economics, which will obviously be his major talking point. Naturally, these positions have awakened contempt for and distrust of Bush within the more extreme base voters, among whom he polls poorly. A big fight clearly looms.

BOOKS DISCUSSED IN THIS ARTICLE

American Dreams: Restoring Economic Opportunity for Everyone
by Marco Rubio.
Sentinel, 212 pp., \$27.95

Blue Collar Conservatives: Recommitting to an America That Works
by Rick Santorum.
Regnery, 216 pp., \$27.99

The Way Forward: Renewing the American Idea
by Paul Ryan.
Twelve, 290 pp., \$27.00

One Nation: What We Can All Do to Save America’s Future
by Ben Carson with Candy Carson.
Sentinel, 225 pp., \$25.95

God, Guns, Grits, and Gravy
by Mike Huckabee.
St. Martin’s, 258 pp., \$26.99

Unintimidated: A Governor’s Story and a Nation’s Challenge
by Scott Walker with Marc Thiessen.
Sentinel, 282 pp., \$16.00 (paper)

The Democrats will face their own drama with regard to these economic questions. What will the presumptive nominee Clinton propose along these lines? How bold will she be? Those desperate for Senator Elizabeth Warren to run are petitioning her not only because they adore Warren, but because they fundamentally don't trust Clinton to embrace aggressive middle-class populist policies. This is a real concern, and Clinton is apparently going to make us all wait for a while, perhaps until the summer, before she starts issuing ideas about policy.

But here's the difference between Clinton and the Republicans. She, like virtually all Democrats, accepts the basic fact that wages for median workers have been more or less stagnant since 1979. She probably accepts the idea that this stagnation, alongside rising inequality, is the greatest economic challenge we face. She probably accepts the standard set of reasons that economists offer about why this has happened—globalization, technological change, immigration patterns, a decrease in workers' bargaining power, the rise in high-end compensation, and various federal tax and wage policies. And finally, she probably accepts that the solutions to the problem are chiefly economic solutions—changing tax policy, giving workers greater “voice,” taking steps to ameliorate the negative effects of globalization, and so on.

The extent to which Republicans accept any of this is far from clear. In six recent books by announced or likely GOP presidential contenders—except Paul Ryan, who surely wrote his book thinking about a run but has apparently decided against it—one hardly encounters the word “wages.” In only one of them, Marco Rubio's *American Dreams*, is there anything resembling what you'd call a discussion of wage stagnation. This lasts for all of four paragraphs, and begins as follows:

After decades of growing incomes for the middle class, the years between 2000 and 2011 were what the Pew Research Center calls a “lost decade.” In those years, middle-class Americans made less money, had more debt and had less wealth—in fact, for the first time since World War II, the middle class actually shrank in size.

He's not quite correct to suggest that incomes grew steadily for decades. They have fluctuated a great deal in the last forty years. They took a hit under George H.W. Bush, for example, such that, after adjusting for inflation, the median household income in 1996 (\$52,471) was essentially the same as in 1989 (\$52,432).² Still, Rubio deserves credit for admitting that the picture was bleak under George W. Bush, something Republicans don't always acknowledge. To the extent that any of them discuss wage stagnation, they discuss it only as yet another blight visited on America by Barack Obama, completely ignoring the longer historical trends.

²The median household income—different from the annual median wage, a figure I use above—actually dropped in the early 1990s. These numbers come from the Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis, at research.stlouisfed.org/fred2/series/MEHOINUSA672N.

Even when Republicans acknowledge the wage problem, they don't see it as resulting from chiefly economic factors. To them, the main culprits are moral decay and culture, notably the decline of the two-parent family—a father and a mother, it nearly goes without saying. Rick Santorum, who made his name as a Pennsylvania senator inveighing against liberal turpitude and comparing homosexuality to bestiality, has passed the time since 2012 refashioning himself as the right's answer to Elizabeth Warren, the man who really cares about the working classes. Here is Santorum on how the American Dream is to be restored:

Conservatives are often criticized for their romanticized view of the good old days prior to the culture shock that was the 1960s. Having said that, let's make no mistake about it—the greatest threat to the average American's achieving his dream today is a dysfunctional culture. To heal our nation, we must promote the ideals upon which American culture has thrived for over two centuries—ideals based on timeless truths.

When people don't see structural economic factors as the problem, they're hardly likely to hit upon plausible economic solutions.

It may not be saying much, but Rubio has written what is far and away the most serious of the recent books. Close observers of the Washington scrum won't be too surprised by this. The Florida senator came to Washington in 2011 as a Tea Party-backed avenger but has, as they like to say in the capital, “matured.” During the past couple of years, he has given speeches on issues like poverty and higher education, topics that conservatives often leave to liberals. He proposed a reform to the Earned Income Tax Credit, the program that offsets the tax burden of lower-income families, that the Obama administration has embraced, extending the credit to households without children.

Unlike the other campaign books, *American Dreams* is at least largely about policy. There are chapters on the struggles of the middle class, regulation in the age of the “sharing economy” (Uber, Airbnb, etc.), higher education, retirement, economic security, and, inevitably, values. Chapters open with homiletic descriptions of the particular crisis in question, told through the stories of a few real-life Americans Rubio has encountered in his journeys, and then move on to prescriptions.

His prescriptions aren't innovative. On poverty, as he said in his speech about a year ago, he wants the federal government to eliminate many of its programs and turn the money over to the states with fewer strings attached. Ronald Reagan proposed this a generation ago. Rubio's chapter on retirement largely repeats the proposals set forth by Paul Ryan in his budgets, proposals that would (especially with regard to Medicare) result in much higher out-of-pocket expenses for future seniors, according to the Congressional Budget Office.

Where his solutions aren't standard conservative policies, they are in fact already in place. With regard to higher education, for example, he wants a

transparent, return-on-investment kind of ranking of colleges and universities, so that applicants and parents can see what kinds of salaries graduates make. And he favors something called “income-based repayment” that would reduce the monthly cost of most graduates' loans. These are plausible ideas. The Obama administration has instituted them both (though not yet on a large scale).

Rubio may or may not seek the presidency. The almost certain candidacy of his fellow Floridian Jeb Bush complicates things for him. (Sometime this spring, Bush will release his own e-book, which will presumably echo the broad themes of his recent Detroit speech.) In addition, Rubio is up for reelection to the Senate in 2016, and he has already said that he will follow Florida law, which forbids seeking two federal offices simultaneously.³ On the evidence presented here, we should hope he does run for president, since he at least seems to want to debate real issues rather than largely imaginary liberal perfidies.

Santorum's *Blue Collar Conservatives* is not an embarrassing book, but

³Joe Lieberman did something similar in 2000, running for both vice-president and senator. Kentucky Republican Senator Rand Paul is in the same boat as Rubio. He wants to run for both offices, but Kentucky law prevents it, and right now, the lower house in the state is controlled by the Democratic Party, which is unlikely to oblige him by changing the law.

ultimately it's a dissatisfying one. Fire-breathing right-winger though he is, Santorum had a long history in the Senate of being one of the few Republicans who bothered to look closely at matters like welfare policy. One doesn't doubt his sincerity when he writes sentences like “We Republicans have neglected to focus our policies and our rhetoric on the plight of lower-income Americans.” Like Bush, Santorum is working off the same script, to some extent, as the so-called “Reformicons,” the conservative pundits and intellectuals who have been trying to push the GOP to take middle-class economics seriously (a quote from Reformicon Ross Douthat of *The New York Times* appears on the back of Santorum's book).

But Santorum puts forth no policy solutions of real interest. His chapter called “Giving the American Worker a Fighting Chance” ends with really just two policy recommendations, and they're the same old ones: cut the corporate tax rate and reduce regulations.

The most annoying of the “serious” books, though, is easily Paul Ryan's. The Wisconsin congressman and 2012 vice-presidential nominee is often supposed to be more analytical about public policy than most of his colleagues. One might have thought, then, that he was equipped to present a serviceably respectable conservative response to the problems of stagnant wages and increasing inequality. But *The Way Forward* has surprisingly little to say about these matters, although in fairness there is a long chapter on poverty.

What instead bursts through the verbiage of his book is Ryan's irritating combination of serene rectitude and

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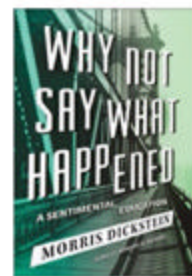


Photo: Richard Alcorn

Morris Dickstein
in conversation with Gary Giddins

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almost total lack of self-awareness. A favorite Ryan dyad of recent vintage was “makers and takers,” his phrase to describe those who contribute to society and those who take advantage of federal largesse. He seemed happy about this slogan. But then one day in 2012, a man challenged him: Who are these takers you speak of? “Is it the person who lost their job and is on unemployment benefits? Is it the veteran who served in Iraq and gets their medical care through the VA?” Apparently, none of this had ever occurred to Ryan, who writes:

Although he doesn’t know it, that guy taught me a valuable lesson that day. It took me a while to completely come around, but I soon realized that the phrase I’d been using implied a certain judgment about the group that receives government benefits—one that is in deep conflict with the American Idea.

I can think of no context in which “taker” does not carry a pejorative connotation. That Ryan had no idea he was insulting half of America (probably more like three quarters) speaks volumes about him and serves as an apt metaphor for conservatism’s intellectual and emotional distance from the Americans it brands as such.

The great conservative preoccupation, as noted, is culture. If you are a candidate and you want the conservative base to lend you its ear, you must thunder that America’s most pressing problem has to do with values.

This brings us to Ben Carson, one of the more interesting characters to publish a political polemic. Carson is African-American, a neurosurgeon who grew up poor in Detroit, and a recipient of the Presidential Medal of Freedom (given to him by George W. Bush). He is extremely conservative. His media moment, the event that put him on the radar screens of conservatives everywhere, came when he gave the keynote address at the 2013 National Prayer Breakfast. With Obama sitting within feet of him, Carson castigated America’s weak leadership and bemoaned its “moral decay” and “fiscal irresponsibility” (he opens *One Nation* with a transcript of the speech and description of that morning). In another speech, he called Obamacare “the worst thing that has happened in this nation since slavery.”

His book is organized into three parts. Part One is the most revealing: “Causes of Disunity and Decline.” Rising inequality? Globalization? No, problem number one is political correctness. Second comes elitism. Carson is said to be hiring a staff in Iowa. Small wonder that he is polling well among Republican primary voters—generally speaking, he’s at the bottom of the first tier of candidates, behind Bush and Chris Christie but ahead of figures like Rubio, Santorum, and governors Rick Perry and Bobby Jindal.

The rhetorical style of *One Nation* is mild-mannered; Carson urges readers at several points to try to take a deep breath and see things through the other fellow’s eyes. The tone belies the radical nature of his views, which he tries to conceal in these pages but which erupt every so often. He appears to believe, for example, that people who pay

no net federal tax—that’s nearly half the country, the famous 47 percent—should not have the right of the franchise: “Serious problems arise when a person who pays nothing has the right to vote and determine what other people are paying.”

Carson seems to have loaned his rhetorical axe to Mike Huckabee, the former Arkansas governor whose deplorable book *God, Guns, Grits, and Gravy* is exactly what it sounds like. It’s an extended pander to the resentful, conservative, evangelical, and probably southern American who doesn’t want liberals who think they’re better than he is telling him what to do. One

As a matter of political strategy, Huckabee’s book is about the Iowa caucuses, where a disproportionate percentage of the electorate consists of evangelicals. If he doesn’t win or at least exceed expectations there, he’ll be out. He could hardly have made his hunger for their support any clearer.

And this brings us to Scott Walker. The Wisconsin governor is the man of the moment (at least as I write these words; such moments can be fleeting). He had a big success in late January at the “Iowa Freedom Summit,” a confab hosted by Congressman Steve King,

religious right approves of him, and he enjoys the firm support of the Koch brothers and others with big money.

Walker has written a different kind of book from the others. It’s an advertisement for himself, a kind of autobiography about his victory over the forces of darkness in passing Act 10, as the anti-union bill was known. The chapters carry dramatic titles—“Bring It On,” “This Is War!,” “You Can’t Recall Courage.” He compares himself to Ronald Reagan. And the last chapter—that is, before the conclusion, postscript, and epilogue—is called “The Lessons of Wisconsin Can Be Used in the Battle for America,” to drive the whole point home, lest anyone miss it.

Walker pursues one clever strategy, which was a theme of his Iowa speech as well. Aware that the noun “conservative” is often preceded by the adjective “heartless,” he plays offense on this question:

Most Americans believe that conservatives care about balancing budgets, while liberals care about putting more money into classrooms. But in Wisconsin, *our* reforms put more money into classrooms. It was the unions and the Democrats who were ready to see us cut a billion dollars from classrooms, and lay off thousands of teachers, just so long as they could continue to fill their coffers with involuntary union dues. We stopped them, and protected students and teachers from disastrous cuts.

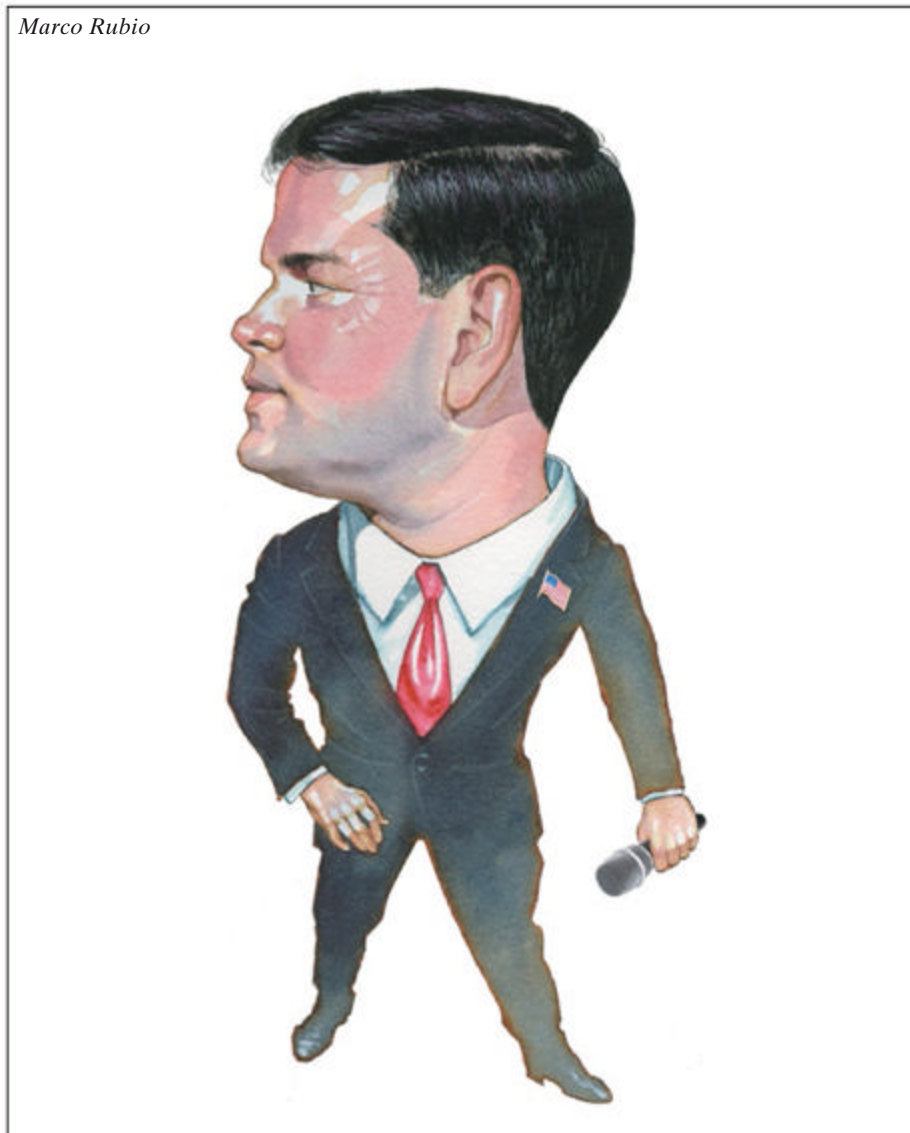
He boasts of his state’s “Obama-Walker voters”—that is, the people who voted for Obama for president and Walker for governor. He cites their existence as evidence of his crossover appeal.

He may have it. But it’s at least as likely that these are voters who don’t mind having a Republican governor every so often but wouldn’t seriously consider voting for a conservative Republican for president. Seven states that haven’t voted for the Republican presidential candidate since at least 1988 currently have GOP governors: Illinois, New Jersey, Massachusetts, Maryland, Michigan, and Maine, as well as Wisconsin. In the five polls of Wisconsin taken in 2014 and recorded by the website RealClearPolitics, in head-to-head matchups, Hillary Clinton beat Walker every time, by an average of nine points.

Those Obama-Walker voters may have no love for public sector unions, but they care about social issues like abortion and same-sex marriage, on which most tilt toward the Democratic position; and they certainly will care, as this campaign grinds on, about what the candidates have to say about middle-class wages.

The Republican Party has spent many years ignoring wage stagnation and dismissing talk of inequality as, in Paul Ryan’s recent phrase, “envy economics.” An interesting dividing line will emerge in this field between those who emphasize these concerns and those who don’t; but even those who are willing to discuss the stagnant situation of the middle class will need to present fresher and less ideologically constrained prescriptions than are on display here. □

Marco Rubio



would call it a dog whistle, except that we Yankee dogs can hear the whistle loud and clear, which is presumably as the author intends.

Huckabee, who has spent the past few years hosting a weekly show on Fox before a live studio audience (he recently gave it up to prepare his candidacy), knows his constituency. The book is full of applause lines (“The IRS is a criminal enterprise”). Chapters carry titles like “Salt, Sugar, Soda, Smokes, and So Much More.” There are a few feints in the direction of talking about policy, but these quickly dissolve into rants. The chapter that purports to be about the economy is really just a long attack on the state of California, where Governor Jerry Brown is alleged to have throttled innovation and initiative with his regime of high taxes and heavy regulation. You’d hardly know from reading the book that California is America’s leading laboratory of innovation (Silicon Valley), and that despite serious post-recession economic woes, it has now bounced back.⁴

⁴See, for example, Vauhini Vara, “How California Bested Texas,” *The New Yorker*, January 8, 2015.

one of Congress’s most extreme radicals. He began surging in polls afterward. The conservative websites have been impressed.

What’s Walker got? He’s been elected and reelected governor in a state that hasn’t voted Republican at the presidential level since 1984. He took on the great liberal dragon of the public employee unions, winning passage of legislation that severely limited the collective bargaining rights of most such unions, hiked members’ pension and health contributions, and made dues payments optional. (Membership in the main public employee local of Madison has dwindled from around 32,000 before the act’s passage to roughly 13,000 today.) When the unions led a recall election against him, he won that, too, making him the first governor in US history to beat back such a challenge.

He’s a preacher’s son and a man of apparently simple and straightforward tastes and enthusiasms. His oddly set eyes seem to conceal more than they reveal, but even this feature is arguably an asset, at least to his admirers: he’s not too handsome, just a nice, regular-looking man. The

How He Captured America

Frank Rich

Hope:
Entertainer of the Century
by Richard Zoglin.
Simon and Schuster, 565 pp., \$30.00

When Bob Hope died in 2003 at the age of one hundred, attention was not widely paid. The “entertainer of the century,” as his biographer Richard Zoglin calls him, had long been regarded by many Americans (if they regarded him at all) “as a cue-card-reading antique, cracking dated jokes about buxom beauty queens and Gerald Ford’s golf game.” A year before his death, *The Onion* had published the fake headline “World’s Last Bob Hope Fan Dies of Old Age.” Though Hope still had champions among comedy luminaries who had grown up idolizing him—Woody Allen and Dick Cavett, most prominently—Christopher Hitchens was in sync with the new century’s consensus when he memorialized him as “paralyzingly, painfully, hopelessly unfunny.”

Zoglin, a longtime editor and writer for *Time*, tells Hope’s story in authoritative detail. But his real mission is to explain and to counter the collapse of Hope’s cultural status, a decline that began well before his death and accelerated posthumously. The book is not a hagiography, however. While Zoglin seems to have received unstinting cooperation from the keepers of Hope’s flame, including his eldest daughter, Linda, he did so without strings of editorial approval attached. Hope’s compulsive womanizing, which spanned most of his sixty-nine-year marriage to the former nightclub singer Dolores Reade (who died at 102, in 2011), is addressed unblinkingly. And with good reason—it was no joke. At least three of his longer-term companions, including the film noir femme fatale Barbara Payton and a Miss World named Rosemarie Frankland whom Hope first met when she was eighteen and he was fifty-eight, died of drug or alcohol abuse.

Zoglin is no less forthright in recounting Hope’s political sideline as a shill for Richard Nixon and Spiro Agnew. The book’s descriptions of his appearances before American troops in wartime, some of them entailing real physical risk, are balanced by less savory episodes such as Hope’s fronting for “Honor America Day,” a Washington propaganda rally staged by the Nixon White House to try to drown out national outrage over the Cambodian invasion and the Kent State University killings in 1970.

Hope’s family and former colleagues no doubt opened up their memories and archives for the simple reason that they, too, are flummoxed by his fast fade from the American consciousness. The many official monuments to Hope’s name—streets from El Paso, Texas, to Branson, Missouri; American Legion posts from Okinawa to Miami; a bridge in Cleveland; an airport in Burbank; a navy cargo ship; an air force transport plane—have failed to stop the erosion of his legacy. Speaking candidly to a fair-minded biographer is a small price to pay for the prospect of a restoration.

These days few readers may know or remember just how big a deal Hope was in his prime. To make his case, Zoglin

must marshal a blizzard of irrefutable statistics (radio and television ratings, box-office grosses) and a touch of hyperbole. The scope of his achievement is “almost unimaginable,” he writes. Hope was both “the most popular” and “the most important” entertainer of the twentieth century, “the only one who achieved success—often No. 1-rated success—in every major genre of mass entertainment in the modern era: vaudeville, Broadway, movies, radio, television, popular song, and live concerts.”

Zoglin further credits him with “essentially” inventing “the modern stand-up comedy monologue,” and with being

of seven sons raised hand-to-mouth by a hard-drinking stonemason and his orphaned, poorly educated Welsh wife. The family emigrated to Cleveland via Ellis Island when Bob was four-and-a-half. His Horatio Alger ascent from near poverty to stardom in ever-expanding modern show business is of a piece with many of his contemporaneous immigrant peers. He tried several callings along the way, from boxing to hoofing, before finding success as a partner in comedy teams. From an apprenticeship on bottom-rung vaudeville circuits, he graduated to the big time on bills headlined by the



Bob Hope in his ‘joke vault,’ Toluca Lake, California, July 1995;
photograph by Annie Leibovitz

“largely responsible” for “setting the parameters” for what it means to be a celebrity in “the age of celebrity.” Hope didn’t so much set those parameters as expand them, devising ever more brazen entrepreneurial innovations to monetize his career. He was the first star to coerce movie studios and television networks into ceding ownership stakes in his movies and television shows to his own production company; the first to market himself as a brand, complete with his own logo and annual golf tournament; the first to tirelessly leverage his good works for image-enhancement as well as charity.

Hope’s greatest gift may have been for self-promotion. He was not one to turn away a single potential customer. In his zeal to plug every upcoming movie or television enterprise, he would grant advance interviews to anyone with a microphone, notepad, or camera. For years, he had his own syndicated column in the Hearst papers. He answered “an amazingly high proportion” of his fan mail and would gladly stop to chat with any fan or autograph seeker who crossed his path. “As an entertainer,” Zoglin writes, “he was the greatest grassroots politician of all time.” Had Hope lived in the digital era, he might have been too busy posing for selfies to find time to do anything else.

He was born Leslie Towns Hope in Eltham, England, in 1903, the fifth

likes of Roscoe “Fatty” Arbuckle and the Hilton sisters, the conjoined twins later to be enshrined in Tod Browning’s film *Freaks*.

Hope’s first break as a solo comic of sorts arrived by chance during a lowly three-night engagement in New Castle, Pennsylvania, in 1927. Asked by the theater manager to announce next week’s show at the signoff of his and his partner George Byrne’s act, he noted that the coming headliner, Marshall Walker, was a Scotsman. “I know him,” Hope continued. “He got married in the backyard so the chickens could get all the rice.” That gag—built on a stereotype yet inoffensive—could well have been in a Hope monologue three decades later. It got a laugh, and the theater manager asked him to keep it up for the rest of the engagement. Hope improvised more jokes each time, a first step down the road toward his most enduring role, as a wisecracking master of ceremonies for all occasions.

Emcees and comic monologists were novelties in 1920s vaudeville. Two early examples, Frank Fay and Will Rogers, were Hope heroes and influences. But before Hope’s own joke-crammed monologues would become the focus of his energy and the fulcrum of his triumphs in radio and television, he conquered Broadway as a musical comedy performer. In *The Ziegfeld Follies of 1936*, in which he appeared with Fanny Brice, Josephine Baker, and the Nicholas Brothers, he introduced the Vernon

Duke–Ira Gershwin standard “I Can’t Get Started.” Months later he and Ethel Merman did the same for Cole Porter’s “It’s De-Lovely” in the musical *Red, Hot and Blue*.

Hope’s Hollywood career, at first mired in forgettable shorts after a disastrous 1930 screen test at Pathé, took off soon after. In *The Big Broadcast of 1938*, he and Shirley Ross were cast as a divorced couple who meet again on a transatlantic ocean liner and sift through the ashes of their marriage in the duet “Thanks for the Memory.” To Zoglin, “it is one of the most beautifully written and performed musical numbers in all of movies.” Beautiful or not, this five-minute-plus piece of film gave Hope a career-long theme song and transformed him into a star. The series of buddy movies he made with Bing Crosby, the most durable achievements of his career, would begin two years later, with *Road to Singapore*, and continue for more than two decades before petering out with *The Road to Hong Kong* in 1962.

The best of the *Road* films remain fun. Hope created a lasting comic persona as the insecure patsy to the more debonair Crosby, his partner in small-time con games and his perennial rival for the affections of Dorothy Lamour. Hope’s exquisite timing, honed on the road and in radio (where he was nicknamed Rapid Robert), is more memorable than the dialogue it punctuates—a syndrome that would continue in his television monologues. (Almost every extant Hope performance on film or television can be found on YouTube, some of it facilitated by the Hope estate.)

Yet for all the irreverence in the Hope–Crosby volleys, they lack an anarchic comic edge. When Hope approached Neil Simon in the early 1970s about securing the film rights to *The Sunshine Boys* for him and Crosby, the playwright’s rejection was telling. Simon wrote to Hope that his title characters, feuding ex-vaudeville partners, were based on the old team of Smith and Dale. “Not only are their appearance, mannerisms and gestures ethnically Jewish,” Simon explained, “but more important, their attitudes are as well.”

In reality, non-Jews have often starred in *The Sunshine Boys* on stage, starting with Jack Albertson in the original Broadway production. The “attitudes” Simon found missing in Hope and Crosby had more to do with comic sensibility than ethnicity. There’s a certain vanilla smoothness to their shtick, even when their characters are in jeopardy; the tone is the antithesis of the high anxiety of a Sunshine Boy or Marx brother. When the *Los Angeles Times* proclaimed Hope “the world’s only happy comedian” in 1941, it was meant as a compliment, but many of Hope’s brethren would have found the very notion of a happy comedian a contradiction in terms.

As Zoglin observes, Hope was the rare Hollywood star of his stature who never worked with a major film director. That in itself is a verdict on his lack of elasticity as an artist. In their afterlife, the Hope–Crosby movies have never

enjoyed the cachet of the Marx Brothers films, let alone the Chaplin and Keaton classics. They don't turn up often at film societies or revival houses and don't receive deluxe DVD restorations. Even as ardent a Hope fan as Woody Allen puts a ceiling on his praise. Speaking to Zoglin about one of Hope's better non-*Road* films, *Monsieur Beaucaire* (1946), Allen observes that while Hope was "a wonderful comic actor," he "was not a sufferer, like Chaplin, or even as dimensional as someone like Groucho Marx, who suggested a kind of intellect. Hope was just a superficial, smiling guy tossing off one-liners. But he was amazingly good at it."

Hope's real comfort zone as an entertainer was not in film, television, or radio. ("It all seemed so strange, talking into a microphone in a studio instead of playing in front of a real audience," he once said of his earliest broadcasting experiences.) It was live performance that galvanized him—or, to put a finer point on it, vaudeville, the medium where he started. Not for nothing did he and Crosby often play vaudevillians in the *Road* movies, or did Hope tour obsessively throughout his career, playing any civic auditorium, college campus, military base, charitable or corporate function that would book him. As late as 1983, the year he turned eighty, he did eighty-six stage shows, forty-two charity benefits, and fourteen golf tournaments on top of his active television career.

"When vaudeville died, television was the box they put it in," Hope joked. When he arrived in the new medium, he simply resurrected the old format, much as he had also done in radio. In lieu of the sketch-heavy comedy revue forged by Sid Caesar, Imogene Coca, and their band of second bananas in *Your Show of Shows*, or the half-hour sitcoms embraced by Lucille Ball, Jackie Gleason, and Phil Silvers, he alighted on the television "special," in which he served as the emcee introducing and intermingling with the variety acts. The one-liners of his opening monologue became the be-all and end-all of his comic energy, even though, as Zoglin writes, "the jokes were always the weakest part of his act" and it was the delivery that carried the day. Hope carried this formula over to his record number of appearances as an Oscar show host (nineteen, including his co-host stints), his annual Christmas visitations with the troops (which would then be packaged as specials), and his guest appearances on other television programs with their own monologists, like Johnny Carson's *Tonight Show*.

To his credit, Hope was, as Zoglin says, "the first comedian to openly acknowledge that he used writers"—as many as a dozen at a time. (Unintentionally, he was also among the first to acknowledge his complete dependence on cue cards; his darting eyes track their off-camera whereabouts just as glaringly whether he's appearing in Burbank or Danang.) Many if not most comics of his day used writers, of course, but Hope did so to an unusual degree. According to Zoglin, only a few moments in the profuse fourth-wall-breaking exchanges between Hope and Crosby in the *Road* movies were ad libs. Little else was improvised either:

The writers were responsible for virtually everything Hope said or that appeared under his name.

They wrote his TV shows, monologues for his personal appearances, magazine articles that carried Hope's by-line, jokes that were fed to columnists such as *Variety*'s Army Archerd, acceptance speeches, commencement addresses, and eulogies. When Hope was a guest on other TV variety shows, he would get the script in advance and have his writers add new lines that he could throw into the sketches during rehearsals. (His practice of rewriting the lines annoyed some producers, who crossed Hope off their guest lists as a result.)

Hope once asked one of his writers, Bob Mills, for jokes about Pentagon generals even though he had no



Bob Hope and Jennifer Mosten, *Miss World 1970*, performing for US troops in Vietnam, December 1970

scheduled appearances before military audiences. When Mills asked why, Hope explained that he needed the scripted lines to make conversation with three generals he was meeting for a round of golf.

Zoglin peppers his biography with swaths of Hope material—jokes, movie dialogue, his patriotic perorations—as if they might give us some insight into the man himself. But it's hard to attribute these passages to him or read them as revelatory since we know they were all written by Norman Panama, Melvin Frank, Sherwood Schwartz, Larry Gelbart, or any of the other top-tier comedy writers who cycled through the Hope word factory. Take away the writers' contributions to "Bob Hope" and what do we know of the offstage Bob Hope?

Zoglin gleans what little he can. Clearly the straitened circumstances of Hope's childhood left him with a zeal for financial success and security, which he achieved with hard work, his tough show business deal-making, and shrewd investments in oil and California real estate. Hope's other principal compulsion was his addiction to adulation from strangers, whether the throngs he entertained on the road, his studio audiences (who were kept unusually close to the stage in a Hope-designed configuration of stacked rows), or the interchangeable sexual partners that he procured into his eighties.

But there's no evidence that he enjoyed emotional intimacy with anyone. He was as much an absentee father to

his four adopted children as he was an absentee husband. He and Crosby were not close; Hope's writers were regularly demeaned and cashiered. Despite their shared Hollywood history and conservative Republicanism, Hope was not, as one might assume, a pal of the Reagans.

"Even to intimates and people who worked with him for years, he remained largely a cipher," Zoglin writes. "He never read books or went to art museums, unless he was dedicating the building." A *Time* reporter who trailed Hope for an article in 1963 concluded "there just wasn't much there"; Hope was cooperative and gracious but "flat, faceless, withdrawn" when he wasn't tossing off jokes. Johnny Carson, the other big comedy star on NBC, concurred. Superficially he and Hope had much in common. As Zoglin writes,

Carson was also "cool, remote, and emotionally detached, ingratiating on the surface, but known intimately by only a few." And he, too, relied heavily on writers for his brilliantly delivered monologues. But Carson "was not a great admirer" of Hope's work, according to his longtime producer Peter Lassally, and did not regard Hope as a good guest. Andrew Nichols, a former Carson co-head writer, elaborated to Zoglin:

There was nothing spontaneous about Hope. He was a guy who relied on his writers for every topic. Johnny was very quick on his feet. Very well read. He was a guy who learned Swahili, learned Russian, learned astronomy. He appreciated people who he felt engaged with the real world. There was nothing to talk to Bob about.

Hope's only known hobby was golf. He didn't much engage even with the political causes he supported. "Bob never really understood the public thinking on Vietnam," said his longtime writer Melville Shavelson, "because he rarely discussed the war with anyone below a five-star general." Though Hope was a staunch anti-Communist who approved of Joe McCarthy, his jokes on the subject were generic and passionless: "Senator McCarthy is going to disclose the name of two million Communists. He just got his hands on a Moscow telephone book." The milquetoast quality of Hope's "topical" jokes and occasional political remarks suggests that he didn't

read the papers much beyond the gossip columnists Walter Winchell (whose film biography was a perennial unrealized Hope project) and Hedda Hopper (who accompanied him on some of his Christmas tours of military bases).

In trying to answer the question of why Hope is in eclipse today, Zoglin speculates in part that he "never recovered from the Vietnam years." Hope made a spectacle of himself then, not so much in his knee-jerk support for the war (his hawkishness did not diminish his Nielsen ratings) but in his obliviousness to the rapid changes in pop culture going on all around him. Ed Sullivan was a bit older than Hope and is no one's idea of a hipster, but he figured out that the Beatles were more than a passing fad, not to mention a commercial opportunity, and booked them at first sight on his own televised vaudeville show. Hope dismissed them with a tone-deaf gag: "Aren't they something? They sound like Hermione Gingold getting mugged." A particularly painful sight among the photos in *Hope* is a shot of the middle-aged Hope, Steve Lawrence, and Eydie Gormé draped in wigs and beads to satirize unwashed hippies. The sharpest insult Hope could muster about Woodstock was that it produced "the most dandruff that was ever in one place."

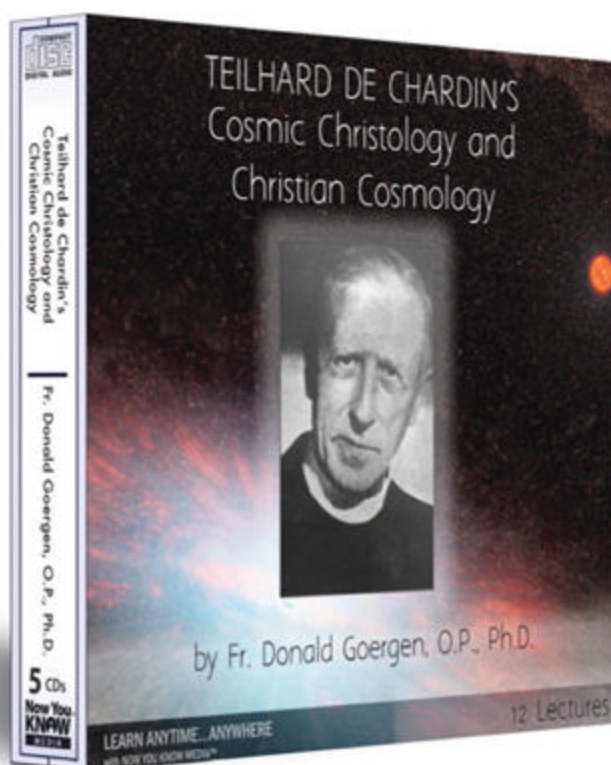
In truth, Hope's brand of comedy was dated before Vietnam consumed the 1960s. New comics like Mike Nichols and Elaine May, Woody Allen, Richard Pryor, Shelley Berman, Bill Cosby, and Bob Newhart all emerged earlier in the decade, just ahead of the counterculture, and quickly became mainstream figures. Unlike their immediate predecessor, Lenny Bruce, they were routinely booked on prime-time television (especially *The Ed Sullivan Show*) and had hit comedy records. Like Hope, they rarely touched on politics in those days, but unlike him, they had idiosyncratic voices—and in most cases developed or wrote their own material.

A half-century later, in our current boom market for comedy, the most popular comedians in America, whether on television or not, are direct descendants of that first new wave of early 1960s comedians. Except for the now semiretired Jay Leno and perhaps his successor on *The Tonight Show*, Jimmy Fallon, it would be hard to name a major American comic of the twenty-first century who is in the Hope mold.

The impersonality of his jokes and the evanescence of his topical references make his television monologues seem more ancient than they actually are. It's hard for comedy to retain its freshness when it surrounds a human vacuum. A monologue from Hope's early 1960s television heyday yields few laughs compared to other stand-up routines of the same vintage that are cheek-by-jowl on YouTube. But there is something about the whole Hope package that is arresting even so: a tightly disciplined musical gift for rhythmic verbal stylization, a cocky physical posture, an almost demonic will to entertain that is, as Zoglin writes, "an affirmation of the American spirit: feisty, independent, indomitable." A Hope performance is as precise and ritualistic as Kabuki, really, and mesmerizing right up to the point that you find yourself tuning out the words. □

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The New Cuba?

Enrique Krauze

**Cuban Revelations:
Behind the Scenes in Havana**
by Marc Frank.
University Press of Florida,
325 pp., \$29.95

The American novelist and historian Waldo Frank was an enthusiastic supporter of the Cuban Revolution. Through three decades of writing about Latin America, he had adapted some of the central themes of the Hebrew prophets to the region that so fascinated him. He came to see Central and South America as a possible new Promised Land where all the American republics could reencounter their political roots in “the democratic Judaeo-Christian vision of the whole man.” In January 1959, when Frank was nearly seventy, he saw the triumph of the Cuban Revolution as the fulfillment of his vision. In the autumn of 1959, the Cuban government, at the behest of Fidel Castro, signed a contract with Frank to write a “biography of Cuba.” Frank would be paid \$5,000. The book was entitled *Cuba: Prophetic Island*.

Frank portrayed what he saw as the rebirth of Cuba under Castro: division of the land, literacy campaigns, the struggle to lower the rate of infant mortality, the opening of formerly private beaches to the general public, the surge in construction of houses, industrial plants, hotels, and farm buildings. And what moved him most of all was the “embrace” between Fidel the redeemer and the Cuban people: “One could feel the sense of possession, as if the island lay really within his arms: the whole island!” For Frank, Fidel was no dictator, he was an artist of power: “Ruthlessly rejecting, selecting, finally shaping it to form.” In the face of so impressive a display of justice and creativity, Frank judged elections to be a “bothersome delay” and freedom of the press “a nuisance.”

But the story of the book ended badly for Waldo Frank. Disturbed by some criticism that he directed at the personal power that Fidel was clearly accumulating, the Cubans refused to publish it.* When the book finally appeared under the imprint of a small left-wing New York publisher, it was savaged with ferocious reviews from both the political right and left. Isolated and embittered, Waldo Frank died in 1967.

Frank’s overall vision was similar to that of various generations of young Latin Americans (and many of their older mentors) inspired by the example of the Cuban David defying the Yankee Goliath. Cuba’s formal adoption of communism did not lessen this wide range of support, but it gradually began to diminish as disturbing news came out of the island: the creation of work camps in 1965, Cuba’s falling into line with the Soviet satellite states in supporting the Soviet invasion of Czecho-

slovakia in 1968, a repression of critical writers in 1971. An exodus of 125,000 Cubans, most of them very poor, who fled to Miami by sea in 1980, further damaged the reputation of the regime.

But it took a long time for public opinion in Latin America to confront the dictatorial nature of the Cuban government. And many would never admit this reality, or else would downplay it by stressing the social achievements of the regime, especially in education and medicine, while blaming a great deal on the American embargo. Fitting into this latter category, with his book



A sign showing Cuban President Raúl Castro, and saying ‘May the earth tremble, compatriots!’, Havana, Cuba, December 2014

Cuban Revelations: Behind the Scenes in Havana, is Marc Frank, Waldo’s grandson and Cuban correspondent for the *Financial Times* and Reuters.

Inspired by the example of his grandfather, Frank arrived in Cuba in 1984, a “tender thirty-three and a tireless crusader for social justice” (his words), and has lived there ever since. In 1995, he married a Cuban nurse, who has been Frank’s personal witness to the quality of medical services in Cuba. Living with them are their two daughters from previous marriages about whose educational experience in Cuba he writes: “Their teachers were examples of dedication, professionalism, and concern even in the hardest of times, and the curriculum was more than adequate. There was little propaganda...”

Cuban Revelations is primarily concerned with the course of the Cuban economy over the last twenty years. It begins with a brief but intense treatment of the final stages (1994–2008) of Fidel Castro’s absolute exercise of power, which ended with the illness that has limited his involvement in government ever since. In 1993, with the collapse of the Soviet Union and the loss of its subsidies (a total between 1960 and 1990 of \$65 billion—40 percent of which was a loan, the rest a gift), Cuba suffered an economic shock with unprecedented effects. Frank describes some of them: broken bones set without anesthesia, sales of the last few treasures that families possessed (books or jewels), necessary products disappearing from store shelves (soap, matches, sanitary pads), and the return of open prostitution. What followed was the grueling “Special Period in Times of Peace,” in

which Fidel accepted some mild economic concessions like legitimizing the circulation of dollars and allowing more latitude for some kinds of occupations and activities (self-employed workers, vendors at farmers’ markets, proprietors of small family-run restaurants) prohibited since the total suppression of private enterprise in 1968.

Frank does not point to Castro’s direct responsibility for some of the effects of this 1993 crisis through his disastrous policy of “Rectification,” implemented from 1986 to 1990 as a reaction to Mikhail Gorbachev’s

perestroika, which he detested. Castro’s new policy included the expansion of rationing, the prohibition of farmers’ markets in the countryside, a decrease in self-employment, and the revival of Ché Guevara’s call for voluntary labor. These measures were directly contrary to those recently adopted by Raúl Castro. According to Carmelo Mesa-Lago, a widely respected expert on Cuban society in the United States, now an emeritus professor at the University of Pittsburgh, whose work Frank does not mention, “Rectification” may have been Fidel’s most serious and costly economic mistake because it prevented measures that might have reduced the impact of the loss of Russian aid and avoided a prolongation of the sudden and terrible suffering of the post-1993 years.

Most significant for Frank was the absence of social unrest. The only outburst of violence protesting the hardships of the Special Period took place in the summer of 1994, along the Malecón, the seafront of Havana. According to Frank, “nothing was set ablaze here, there was no tear gas, and there were no riot police. Bused-in construction workers, some with metal rods in hand, quickly restored order.”

Finally the arrival of Fidel controlled the situation. And the government decided to permit a large-scale exodus on improvised rafts—known as “the crisis of the *balseros* [rafters]”—partly to relieve internal pressure and partly to move the United States toward formal immigration agreements. Frank describes the sight of the rafts as “quite spectacular,” but it was much more

than that: a desperate flight in large part drawn from the most vulnerable sector of the Cuban population, the Afro-Cubans from the eastern part of the island willing to cross the perilous ninety miles to the US on rafts constructed with wooden planks, bed-sheets, and worn-out tires.

So far as one can tell from talks with refugees and experts, the motives of the departing Cubans were not in most cases based on political liberty but on acute economic need. These motives are never referred to in Frank’s book. And he nowhere documents—or directly blames—the systematic and intimidating control of the state apparatus over Cuban lives, a condition that could well have inhibited the free manifestation of discontent in the Special Period or any other time. What we do hear is a long exchange between Frank and a young psychology student to whom he gave a lift while driving in the countryside. She answers his question “Do you think he [Fidel] can go on?” with “If there is going to be another, let him be just like him, with his same ideas and same personality.” Frank doesn’t think very differently. He calls Fidel “the last of the romantic revolutionary figures” of the twentieth century and even likens him to Nelson Mandela (an inapt comparison given Mandela’s commitment to genuine democracy, voting, and individual rights).

Without explaining how he arrived at the figure, Frank estimates what he calls the “Grey Zone” of the nonmilitant discontented at 30 percent. In his opinion, the cause of discontent is not the dictatorial application of the “purist ideology” he praises or the fear of repression or informers. For him, the fundamental reason is economic need. Something has gone bad, he recognizes, when a bottle of cooking oil can be worth three days’ pay. And he proposes a metaphor, that of the American “company town” and its single store where “it would take hours of work to buy a pound of beans or rice, a head of garlic, a cucumber, a single mango, or a few onions or tomatoes.”

What Frank lacks is concrete accounts of material suffering (of families or individuals) within the “company town.” For such images of extreme need and despair we have to turn to the Twitter account of the blogger Ysnaby Pérez, a young unemployed engineer who connects to the Web through a Spanish provider. He describes women and men with plastic bags in hand wandering the streets as they seek to “resolve” (*resolver* being a prominent verb in daily Cuban life) the problems of subsistence on a worker’s income of about twenty dollars a month, professionals without employment selling bananas or cigarette lighters on the streets, rafters heading to Miami on the often dangerous ocean. *Cuban Revelations* does not disclose that part of Cuban reality. Rather it hides it.

Frank’s *Cuban Revelations* makes almost no use of the extensive and solid academic analyses on modern Cuba. It is essentially a long reportage based on internal documents produced by the hermetic Cuban political apparatus as

*A Spanish version of the book was finally published in Argentina: *Cuba: Isla profética* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Losada, 1961). Additional footnotes appear in the Web version of this article at www.nybooks.com.

well as discussions with ordinary Cubans from many niches of society. The strength of the book lies in Frank's detailed investigation of Raúl Castro's reforms since his unexpected appointment to power in the summer of 2006, when a severe intestinal illness struck his brother Fidel, stripping him more and more thoroughly of his command over the society that—in all its aspects and for close to half a century—had been under his complete personal control.

Between 2007 and 2009 Raúl made some administrative changes, minor but important for Cubans, who were admitted to hotels, for instance, that had been previously reserved only for tourists. But most significant was Raúl's handling of national and international politics, which Frank minutely reconstructs, exploring the process of reconciliation with Latin America, the Vatican, and the nations of Europe. Following a speech by Raúl and a document created by an academic committee, the 800,000 members of the Cuban Communist Party were urged to discuss the flaws of the Cuban economy. This was the signal for a discussion that lasted four years, limited—as one might expect—to the economic functioning of Cuba as a “company town” but not including its political structure and, still less, the reason for its existence.

Modest reforms carried out between 1991 and 1995 served to initiate a partial recovery but Cuba really emerged from the crisis of the 1990s only after the extravagant subsidies of Hugo Chávez began in 2000. The annual aid that Chávez provided—in petroleum, investments, and currency—came to surpass that of the Soviet Union, and by 2010

would total nearly \$13 billion, 21 percent of Cuba's GDP that year. Not surprisingly, after a journey that Frank was used to taking every year across the land, he noted the signs of an economy reanimated by Venezuelan support: Chinese electric ovens, electricity, gas, bicycles.

But then came the summer of 2008 with devastating natural and financial hurricanes: the hurricanes Gustav and Ike, and the worldwide financial crisis. Confronting this situation, Raúl took one step forward, applying a kind of self-criticism that is very common in the Soviet tradition. He had to save the revolution by correcting the “vices,” the “errors” into which it had descended. Suddenly, Cuba's only newspapers—*Granma* and *Juventud Rebelde*—always the guardians of orthodoxy, started to criticize the failures of the Cuban bureaucracy. In the government's self-diagnosis, the main problem was “attitude,” not structure or model.

In 2010, Raúl began a wave of reforms: he expanded nonstate employment (dubbed literally “on-your-ownism” or *cuenta-propismo*); encouraged the distribution and cultivation of idle state-owned land; and supported autonomous cooperatives in agriculture and services, as well as the freedom to buy and sell houses and cars. The country needed to find work for 1.8 million people who were to be dismissed, as superfluous employees, from 3,700 state enterprises (50 percent of which were losing money). Raúl sought to encourage a limited degree of private and cooperative production in goods and services. “Cuba is the only country in the world,” he noted, “where people can live without working.”

Frank describes the profusion in recent years of kiosks, mobile snack carts, and mom-and-pop restaurants, calling out their varied wares throughout the streets of Cuban cities, all of which he has observed in his yearly travels across the island. His visit to a now privatized taxi cooperative reveals the tensions underlying this transition. Previously the employees could “hang out...doing nothing” and even sometimes take their families to the beach during work hours, all expenses paid. But now they are expected to work. And he supplements this account with a later visit to an agricultural cooperative, revealing how the workers there were being harassed by government bureaucrats opposed to the reforms for fear of losing their jobs.

Frank believes that Cuba has already undergone an irreversible change of mentality, a movement toward discarding the creaky Soviet-style system and steadily adopting a form of mixed and decentralized economy. Carmelo Mesa-Lago—who has closely followed the progress of the present reforms (similar to those he has been recommending for four decades)—is less optimistic. He feels they are a move in the right direction, unprecedented for the revolutionary regime, and (with the ideological weight of Fidel out of the picture) they seem irreversible. But he argues that these reforms are far too cautious, far too slow, and already face many obstacles that severely limit their effects.

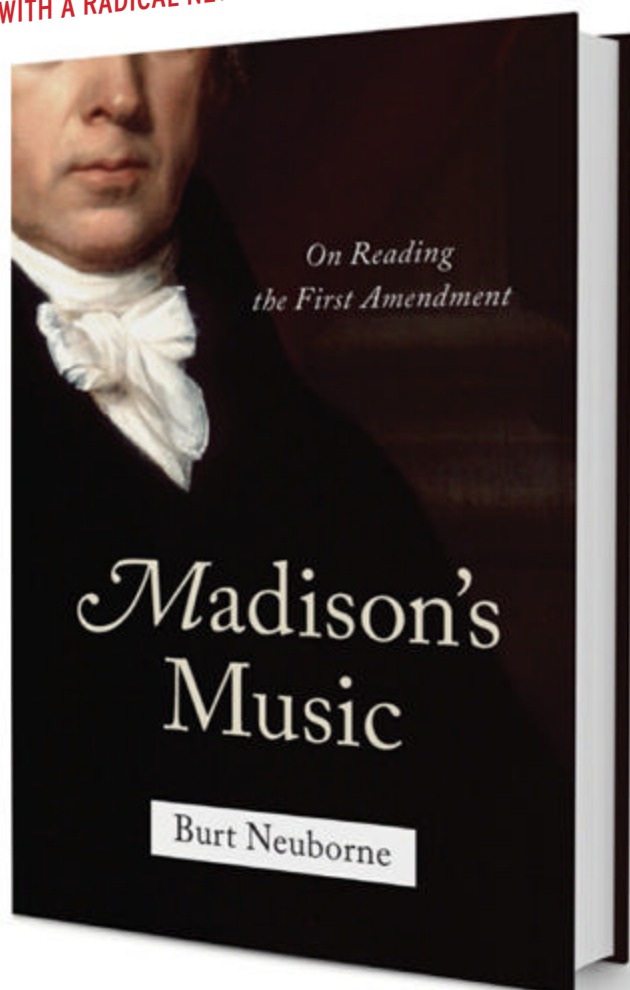
The new farmers (174,275 of them by official count) benefited from the distribution of formerly idle land but they have not been able to significantly increase production because of a host of

limitations. These include the restriction of investments by the farmers themselves to 1 percent of the sixty-seven hectare parcels, thus limiting the potential for increased production within the parcels. They also include the obligation to sell most of their harvests to the state (which fixes the prices to be paid). And they face the specter of a time limit on their contracts (in ten years, the state can decide to renew or cancel them). Additionally, they face obstacles to the hiring of employees outside the family, a lack of credit and experience, and a prohibition against the free sale of basic products like meat, milk, rice, beans, potatoes, and oranges.

By the end of 2014 about 600,000 state employees (33 percent of the original goal) had been dismissed from their jobs. But there has not been enough creation of nonstate jobs to absorb those who have been fired. The independent workers called on-your-ownists are mostly peripheral employees (they have such professions as street performers, public bathroom attendants, or trimmers of palm trees). College graduates—doctors, teachers, or architects—can drive a cab but cannot privately practice the profession they have been trained for. This is a waste of the human capital created by the revolution itself. Mesa-Lago believes that the Cuban government could more closely emulate the Vietnamese or Chinese experience, where private property, freedom in hiring, and general economic liberties for individuals and companies are much more unrestricted.

What would happen to Cuba if the Venezuelan economy collapses? Mesa-Lago feels that it would be a serious

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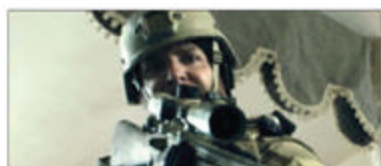
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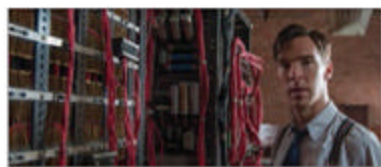
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matter but not as catastrophic as the crisis of the 1990s. Venezuela absorbs 35 percent of Cuba's foreign trade deficit, a considerable figure but much less than the 72 percent formerly absorbed by the USSR. The Cuban government has attributed its problems to the US embargo. Mesa-Lago has always denounced the embargo but he argues that "the fundamental cause of Cuba's problems has been its economic policy over the past half century." The developing relationship with the United States may improve the situation but, according to Mesa-Lago, nothing is more important than a change in the economic model, which is necessary even to preserve the social accomplishments of the regime.

Frank says that most Cubans are dissidents, by which he means they engage in respectable dissidence "seeking change through reform and evolution of the system." For him, they are not "dissidents," a word he hems in with quotes to describe those he sees as "in open alliance with Washington and Miami's political establishment which seeks regime change." His argument frankly downgrades the legitimacy and courage of the genuine dissidents, past and present, who have risked and lost their freedom and sometimes even their lives in deeply felt and justified protest, like the dissident leader Oswaldo Payá—whose plan of internal democratization (called *Proyecto Varela*) attracted considerable international support. He died in an unexplained automobile accident in July 2012. (Frank ignores suspicions about his death.) Frank also fails to mention the activities of dissident Catholic groups or organizations like Unión Patriótica de Cuba or Arco Progresista, which express the views of the Afro-Cuban community increasingly estranged from the country's mostly white leadership since the crisis of 1990s.

In a country without a legally recognized opposition, one of the most notable figures is the blogger Yoani Sánchez, expert at stripping away the doublespeak of the Cuban gerontocracy. 650,000 people follow her Twitter postings, and her blog, *Generación Y*, has been translated into seventeen languages. Frank has never met her. Cubans are not allowed to have personal Internet accounts, so no one can connect directly with Sánchez, but flash drives of blogs and writings covertly circulate and are passed from hand to hand.

Bloggers have been placed under surveillance, questioned by the authorities, and sometimes imprisoned. A specialized police unit at Havana's airport checks for any illegal importation of computers or cell phones. Cuba had eight hundred Internet cafés in 2013 but their price is exorbitant for ordinary Cubans (\$4.50 per hour) and the user has to supply the number of his identity card, his address, and the object of his Internet search.

Frank does not seem to be disturbed by control or censorship of the Internet in Cuba but rather by its slow speed. And he applies his rhetorical skills to the issue: "How can one explain that arguably the region's most advanced nation in terms of health, education, social peace, and civil defense has the area's worst communications?" Once again he follows the pattern of simply accepting the existence of serious problems but balancing them with a reference to the achievements of the regime, includ-

ing a degree of social peace imposed by dictatorship, a word he never uses. Frank answers his rhetorical question by citing the government's fear—justified in his opinion—that a complete opening of communications would unleash a cyberwar, a kind of Bay of Pigs invasion waged on the Internet. And Frank insists that the average Cuban blames both the government and the US embargo for the inadequate service.

This sharing of responsibility for the Cuban drama is one of Frank's central theses, affecting not only modern communications but the very nature of the regime:

Does the Cuban Communist Party repress its opponents? Without a doubt! Does the US embargo aim at making Cubans suffer to the



A raft being driven to a beach near Havana for an attempt to reach the US by sea during the 1994 exodus from Cuba, in which thousands were allowed to leave, September 1994

point where, it is hoped, they desperately topple the government? No question about it!

The attempts by the US to subvert the original Cuban Revolution certainly hastened the development of Cuba's security and police state, but the persecution carried out by the regime against the extensive political and social opposition over more than five decades cannot simply be labeled an equivalent quid pro quo. The unjustifiable US embargo does not justify such violations of elementary human rights.

"Life is a book. We simply turned the page and moved on," said a Vietnamese official about his country's relationship to its former enemy, the US. It is a statement that impressed Frank and he uses it as the epigraph to a chapter of conclusions. But the words are also an invitation to amnesia, an outlook that would absolve the Castro brothers of the responsibility for their dictatorial decisions over fifty-five years, with "self-criticism" as their only limit, which is to say no limit at all.

It should be remembered that Cuba, before the revolution, produced 80 percent of its food, while today it imports the same percentage, which costs \$2.5 billion annually. "Simply turning the page" would leave unanswered the question of why industrial production fell by 45 percent and sugar production

by 80 percent between 1989 and 2013. It was not just the result of the embargo.

And without disparaging the considerable social accomplishments of the revolution—in education and health care particularly—it should be remembered (as even some Marxist historians have recognized) that Cuba before the revolution, despite being a country of social, regional, and ethnic inequality, with wealth skewed in favor of a relatively small proportion of the population, reflected clear social and economic progress, even under the dictatorship of Batista. It had the third-highest domestic product per capita in Latin America (surpassed only by Venezuela and Uruguay), the third-highest consumption of protein (after Argentina and Uruguay), the lowest infant mortality rate, and was already among the leading countries of Latin America in literacy (though the regime has vastly expanded health services and education). And finally, "simply turning the page" would be an incentive to ignore Fidel's immense personal responsibility for the ruin of the Cuban economy and the effects of his lengthy personal dictatorship on generations of Cubans.

But the statement may perhaps be applied to Frank himself, who describes his grandfather as "a man both blessed and cursed with the courage to be different." In Cuba (where he was silenced) and in the United States, Waldo Frank paid for his courage in both defending Castro while at the same time pointing to the dangers of his personal leadership. In his memoirs he noted that when he was engaged in a book on Fidel, "I could write what I wished... until my defense of Castro's Cuba lost me that commission. The trend was wide-spread. A tide was ebbing, and I alone on the sands."

Marc Frank does not take risks in Cuba, where he admits to applying a rule-of-thumb: "You're nice to them and they're nice to you." In his first book, *Cuba Looks to the Year 2000* (1993), he firmly defended the economic, political, and moral leadership of Fidel Castro and his disastrous "Rectification" policy. And in the introduction to that first book, he gives some biographical details that situate his views at the time: "[In January 1990] I had toured 20 states in the USA to talk about Cuba. I had five years in Cuba and over 1,000 articles under my belt as the Havana-based *People's Daily World* Latin American correspondent." Formerly a staunch defender of a Soviet-style system, he is now a convinced reformist. Yet beyond referring to a Bob Dylan song ("The Times They Are a-Changin'"), his general analysis of the economic reforms in Cuba does not include reflection on his own acceptance of heavy state control and then revision of his views.

Nowhere does he explicitly admit (much less document) the terrible price that generations of Cubans have paid, isolated from the world, subject to surveillance and the fear of repression, limited to the official version of the truth, and unable to exercise elementary civil liberties or to freely protest or to safely emigrate. The failure to deal with the long (and present-day) history of the Cuban people—not only of dissidents—is itself a revelation by omission. In the case of Cuba, we cannot "simply turn the page and move on." □

—Translated from the Spanish
by Hank Heifetz.

This is the first of two articles on Cuba.

The Biology of Being Good to Others

H. Allen Orr

Does Altruism Exist?: Culture, Genes, and the Welfare of Others

by David Sloan Wilson.
Yale University Press/
Templeton Press, 180 pp., \$27.50

1.

Altruism may seem a good thing—unless you happen to be an evolutionary biologist. Then it may seem a mixture of a mystery and a curse. The reason isn't hard to see. How could a ruthless process like Darwinian natural selection give rise to altruistic organisms, human or nonhuman, that act in ways that are costly to themselves and helpful to others? Darwin himself was aware of the difficulty and offered some tentative solutions, but it was during the twentieth century that altruism became the subject of nearly fetishistic attention among evolutionary biologists.

One imaginable solution is to deny that altruism really exists in nature or to claim that it's so rare as to be unworthy of serious attention. Another solution is to construct clever theories that show how natural selection is actually expected to yield altruism. Such theories typically hinge on the level at which natural selection acts. Does it select for fitter organisms, or fitter genes, or populations, or species? Indeed the problem of altruism and the so-called levels-of-selection problem have become nearly inseparable.

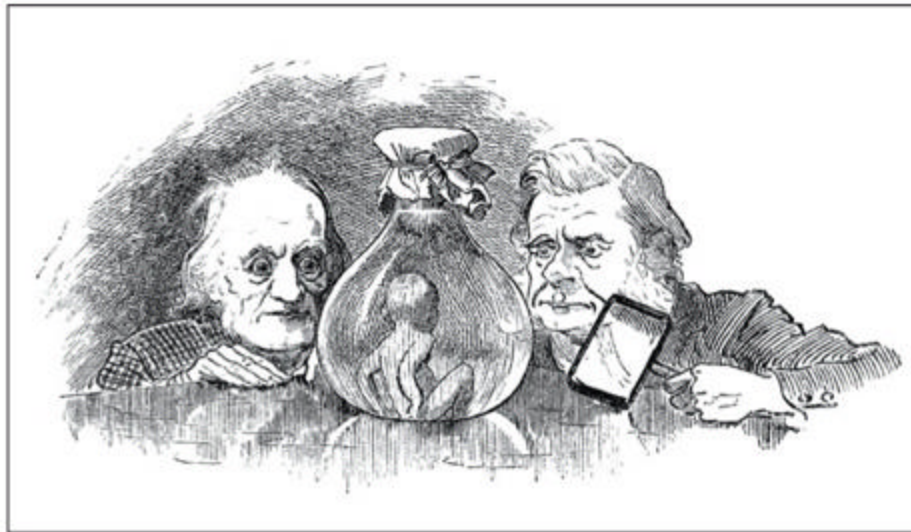
David Sloan Wilson has focused on these twin biological problems for several decades. Wilson, the SUNY Distinguished Professor of Biology and Anthropology at Binghamton University, is widely regarded by biologists as a partisan in this debate. He has been the indefatigable champion of one particular theory, "multilevel selection," for much of his career. This theory, it seems fair to say, has been a minority view among evolutionists. Ask one how altruism evolves and you are very unlikely to hear "by multilevel selection."

But Wilson, who has written several books on evolution, does something unexpected in his new book. He announces that the problem of altruism has been definitively solved and that the levels-of-selection debate has been finally resolved. In fact it's so resolved, he tells us, that it remains of interest only to historians of science. *Does Altruism Exist?* aims to present this "postresolution" view of how natural selection acts to the general reader.

As you might guess, Wilson's own theory fares well in this postresolution view. Wilson thinks that multilevel selection (which I'll explain below) not only accounts for altruism, it also provides a powerful way to think about, and even to help guide, the evolution of human social institutions like economies. The connection between how natural selection shapes the biological world and how human social institutions are arranged may not be obvious, but Wilson believes that the connection is both deep and important.

2.

To begin at the end, Wilson's answer to his titular question is yes, altruism exists. But getting to this answer requires some work. Wilson starts by distinguishing actions from thoughts. Thoughts, feelings, and rhetoric matter when it comes to altruism only insofar as they motivate actions that actually improve the welfare of a group. The actions that most matter are those that contribute to "group-level functional organization": altruistic behavior by an individual can contribute to the smooth



Scientists Richard Owen and Thomas Henry Huxley studying a water-baby in a flask; illustration designed by Linley Sambourne and engraved by Joseph Swain, from Charles Kingsley's *The Water-Babies: A Fairy Tale for a Land-Baby*, 1885

functioning of some group, whether an ant colony or a band of human hunters.

How can this smooth functioning of a group evolve? Wilson is certain that it's not by selecting for the fittest individuals within a group, as the popular picture of natural selection would suggest. The reason is simple. Tradeoffs are the norm in life and when individuals act to further their own interests they generally don't further the interests of the group. Indeed individuals can often do best by cheating, that is by shirking their group duties and looking out for *numero uno*.

To see this, consider an ant colony. Individual ants within a colony have specific duties depending on whether they are workers, soldiers, and so on. When every ant plays its part the colony functions smoothly. But these duties involve costs. Often, no one in the colony gets to reproduce except the queen and the rare male. And a soldier might well be called upon to sacrifice her life for the sake of the colony. A soldier might seem better off if she would cheat, abandon her soldierly duties, and reproduce. Presumably, that's what natural selection at the individual level would have her do. In the language of biology, then, natural selection acting on individuals within groups generally won't yield the kind of selfless behavior needed for group function.

So then how can group function and altruism evolve? Simple, says Wilson: groups that include more altruists generally perform better *as groups* than groups that include fewer altruists. To return to our ants, a colony in which everyone selflessly plays their part is a healthy colony that functions, survives, and ultimately gives rise to a new colony

more readily than would a colony that harbors selfish ants. In the language of biology, selecting for the fittest groups can increase the number of altruists through time. Hence one of Wilson's main conclusions: "*Group-level functional organization evolves primarily by natural selection between groups.*"

In the real biological world, natural selection at these different levels—within groups and between groups—can occur simultaneously. And these forms of selection might have different relative strengths in different species or environmental situations. In some

cases, the force of within-group selection might overwhelm between-group selection (selfishness wins) and in other cases the opposite (altruism wins, as in our ants). A mature theory of natural selection must consider all such levels, weighing mathematically their relative strengths, and determining when the interests of the group win out over the interests of the individual. That's what the theory of multilevel selection does.

If you haven't read many popular accounts of evolutionary biology, this likely all sounds fairly uncontroversial. But if you have, it may sound mildly scandalous. That's because the long and acrimonious levels-of-selection debate yielded a rough consensus that selection at the group level is generally unimportant in evolution.¹ Instead, biologists are far more likely to explain the evolution of traits or behaviors—including, most famously, altruism itself—by invoking natural selection at the level of genes.

This view was popularized in 1976 by Richard Dawkins in his book *The Selfish Gene*. But the real breakthrough came in the 1960s with W.D. Hamilton's theory of kin selection. Hamilton saw mathematically that a gene that

encourages an organism to act altruistically can actually increase in numbers from one generation to the next by natural selection if those who benefit from the altruism tend to be relatives of the altruist. The reason is that, as kin, these beneficiaries of altruistic behavior often also carry the gene for altruism. (If I carry a gene that causes me to throw myself on a hand grenade, this gene can increase in numbers through time if I preferentially save my brothers and sisters, who often carry the same gene.) Gene-level thinking about natural selection is now nearly reflexive among evolutionary biologists.

Wilson doesn't reject this gene's-eye view of evolution. Instead he argues for a formal equivalence. A number of evolutionary theorists have now concluded that multilevel selection theory and kin selection theory are equivalent mathematically, and this equivalence is a centerpiece of Wilson's book. Importantly, he emphasizes that the two theories invoke the same causal processes and make the same quantitative predictions. They just do their bookkeeping—tracking the statistical consequences of natural selection—in different ways.

Something like this equivalence was first hinted at by George Price in 1972 in his famous (and famously subtle) theorem now known as the Price Equation. Price's theorem deeply impressed Hamilton, who, later in his career, began to emphasize that kin selection and multilevel selection were closely connected. This connection has since been studied exhaustively by mathematical biologists, many of whom have arrived at the "equivalence thesis" that Wilson champions in *Does Altruism Exist?*

Wilson also spends some time on the general idea of equivalence in the philosophy of science. Different theories that make the same predictions but that perform their bookkeeping in different ways might often be available to scientists. (Just as, he says, different ways of keeping financial books, say by date or tax status, are available to accountants.) And these different perspectives on the same problem may often prove useful. Such equivalent views are related to, but different from, the "paradigms" of Thomas Kuhn. Whereas Kuhn considered the often-tortuous replacement of one paradigm by another—the move from Ptolemaic to Copernican cosmology, for example—Wilson argues that equivalent views "*deserve to coexist.*" Scientists, Wilson says, should be schooled in the idea of equivalence just as they are in hypothesis testing. This might well prevent scientists from wasting precious research time in futile debates over which bookkeeping scheme is fundamentally "correct," a fate, he says, that plagued discussion of the levels of selection until recently.

3.

Wilson is convinced that there's nothing about natural selection that limits its application to traits shaped by genes. Instead, he says, natural selection can also apply to traits shaped by culture, that is by thoughts, beliefs, or,

more generally, systems of symbols. Symbolic thought can affect behavior in the same way that genes can and the resulting behavior “can potentially influence survival and reproduction in the real world.” Wilson insists that this new kind of natural selection can be folded into multilevel selection theory:

Regardless of whether a phenotypic trait is genetically inherited, learned, or culturally derived, it can spread by virtue of benefitting individuals compared to other individuals in the same group, by benefitting all individuals in a group compared to other groups, and so on for a multilevel hierarchy of groups.

Wilson thus devotes the second half of his book to what multilevel selection theory has to say about human cultural phenomena like religion or economies. In each case, he hopes to determine if altruism actually exists: “How well do religions, economies, and everyday social units, such as city neighborhoods, function to improve the welfare of their members?” Importantly, in each of these cases, we’re confronted with the potentially conflicting goals of groups (say, to save the planet) and individuals (say, to maximize profits by dumping toxic waste).

Wilson is pretty sure that his multilevel selection theory of humanity can do big things for us. His claims, moreover, are not merely descriptive but prescriptive. Evolutionary theory can explain not only when the generally noble interests of groups trump the generally selfish interests of individuals, it can also help us to identify social arrangements that give an edge to the group:

If we want to solve the most pressing problems of our age, such as world peace and global environmental sustainability, then more cultural evolution is required and it must be guided by a sophisticated knowledge of evolution.

In case you’re wondering who might guide us through these treacherous evolutionary waters, Wilson describes two initiatives he helped to launch: EvoS, a “multi-institution consortium” devoted to evolutionary studies at the biological and cultural levels, and the Evolution Institute, the “first think tank that formulates public policy from a modern evolutionary perspective.”

It’s hard to exaggerate Wilson’s ambitions in this part of his book. Indeed he acknowledges considerable overlap between his project and that of Auguste Comte, the nineteenth-century positivist and great champion of a scientific religion of humanity. And Comte’s failure here doesn’t give Wilson much pause:

But Comte’s pre-Darwinian understanding of nature, the human mind, and religion are laughably old-fashioned compared to what we know today. Realizing that our own knowledge is still provisional, perhaps we are in a position to succeed where Comte and his contemporaries failed.

Wilson has written on religion before and his views in *Does Altruism Exist?* are fairly predictable. Religion is, he believes, false in any literal sense. But

it’s common throughout humanity for good reason: religion is a group-level adaptation that spread by cultural evolution. In particular, “religions cause people to behave for the good of the group and to avoid self-serving behaviors at the expense of other members of their group.” (Wilson also claims that, somewhat surprisingly, believers typically don’t think of their behavior as altruistic; but, again, it’s actions that count.) Groups that embraced religion might therefore have outcompeted groups that didn’t, with religion spreading throughout human history by natural selection. Given its effectiveness in suppressing selfishness, Wilson, while a nonbeliever, appears respectfully tolerant of religious practice and distances himself from the heated rhetoric of “New Atheists” such as Christopher



Hitchens and Richard Dawkins.

Wilson’s views on economics are newer and far more provocative. Traditional economic theory, he tells us, is based on *Homo economicus*, an idealized rational agent who accurately weighs costs and benefits and acts always to maximize self-interest. Economics teaches that, paradoxically, the collective action of many such agents can increase the common good.

Wilson will have none of it. He tells us about Ayn Rand’s economic fundamentalism and walks us through *Flash Boys*, Michael Lewis’s account of high-frequency traders on Wall Street. Recoiling in a mix of moral and intellectual horror, he announces that “it was a monumental mistake to conclude that something as complex as a large society can self-organize on the basis of individual greed.”

Fortunately, Wilson says, “evolutionary theory can set us on the right path.” Since *Homo economicus* acts only to increase his individual fitness within groups, multilevel selection theory shows that we can expect little group-level functional organization from him. Instead “unrestrained self-interest is far more likely to *undermine* the common good.” The emergence of smoothly functioning groups requires action at a different level: “Societies function well when they are a product of society-level selection.” Indeed Wilson argues that the only legitimate version of Adam Smith’s invisible hand is one that moves at the level of whole societies, sorting those economic arrangements that work from those that don’t. Wilson provides no examples here but, from his tone, it seems likely that he’d include American capitalist markets among

those arrangements that don’t work for the benefit of people generally.

4.

Does Altruism Exist? is a decidedly mixed bag. Among its strengths, Wilson clearly lays out the logic of multilevel selection theory. He is right that there is no principled reason why natural selection cannot occur simultaneously at multiple levels in the biological hierarchy, from genes, through individuals, populations, and species. And his presentation of the theory, shorn of all mathematical niceties, is among the most lucid I’ve seen. From his account we can see how selection at the between-group level can sometimes plausibly overwhelm selection at the

within-group level, say, providing one way to understand the evolution of ants that act selflessly for the good of the colony.

It’s also true that many evolutionary theorists now argue that multilevel selection and kin selection are generally equivalent mathematically and they yield the same numerical predictions about the extent of genetic change from one generation to the next. Though this view is not universal, the long and fierce debate over the proper way to frame social evolution shows at least some signs of simmering down.

Wilson’s more philosophical discussion of equivalence among scientific theories generally is also strong. The fact that a process occurs in some singular way in nature doesn’t mean that there is only one legitimate way to think about it as a scientist. So long as different perspectives on a process make the same predictions and, ideally, can be translated from the language of one theory to another, it would seem absurd to argue that scientists must choose among them.

Wilson comes up short, however, in not emphasizing forcefully enough that just because different perspectives might be equivalent formally, they aren’t necessarily equivalent in the actual practice of science. Some perspectives might well be more natural, more productive, or simply easier to use than others. Indeed in evolutionary biology, it’s often easier to think about evolution in terms of the relatedness of individuals (as in kin selection) than in terms of group structure (as in multilevel selection), particularly in species where the sharp demarcation of groups is less than obvious. And it would be hard to

deny that many more insights into biology—some deeply surprising—have followed from gene-level thinking than from multilevel selection thinking. Wilson doesn’t quite deny all this but I doubt that the average reader of *Does Altruism Exist?* would guess it.²

But it’s when Wilson turns to the social lives of human beings that his views become more problematic. There are several difficulties.

One is that Wilson’s multilevel selection theory is so broad, so causally inclusive, that it may well be able to explain nearly anything about people. When a theory allows genetic selection to act at any level in the biological hierarchy and cultural selection to act at any level in the social hierarchy, it’s hard to imagine many facts about people that might remain refractory to “explanation” by it. In science, a theory can be a little too pliant for its own good and Wilson may have found one. It would have been helpful had he listed some imaginable observations about people that would force him to seriously question his theory. Just what plausible property of religious practice, for example, might cause Wilson to conclude that multilevel selection played little part in its history? (If the early church had held that each believer should maximize his material well-being and not attend to the welfare of the community, wouldn’t Wilson conclude that Christianity spread by cultural evolution at the *individual* level?)³

Also, many of Wilson’s insights about society that purportedly follow from multilevel selection are frankly banal. Do we really need mathematical evolutionary theory to tell us that if we want society to successfully pursue a common goal, then individuals shouldn’t constantly cheat one another?

Part of the problem here is that Wilson inverts the actual order of logical inference. Evolutionary biologists didn’t invent the idea of individual cheaters who subvert the goals of groups. Instead, evolutionists described biological cheaters by analogy with social phenomena that were already familiar. (“This gene acts like a cheater in a game....”) We already knew that people who cheat can compromise the goals of groups and thus must be stopped. That’s why armies shoot deserters and why governments chase tax evaders. Reimporting evolutionary theory here does little but dress up these commonsensical notions in pseudoscientific garb that seems both uninformative and pretentious.

Wilson also sometimes makes things too easy for himself. This is clearest in his attempted demolition of economics,

²For recent, and more technical, discussions of the equivalence thesis in evolutionary biology (including distinctions among formal, casual, and pragmatic equivalence), see Steven A. Frank’s “Natural selection. VII. History and Interpretation of Kin Selection Theory,” *Journal of Evolutionary Biology*, Vol. 26, No. 6 (June 2013) and Samir Okasha’s “The Relation Between Kin Selection and Multilevel Selection: An Approach Using Causal Graphs,” *British Journal for the Philosophy of Science*, January 20, 2015.

³For more on this concern, see my previous review of Wilson’s book on the evolution of religion, *Darwin’s Cathedral*, in *Evolution*, Vol. 57, No. 1 (January 2003).

which depends heavily on omission and caricature. Reading Wilson, one would guess that economists engage in a kind of magical thinking when concluding that the pursuit of enlightened self-interest can make the world a better place. That's partly because he never reveals the actual logic of their arguments. In an entire chapter devoted to the absurdities of economic orthodoxy, Wilson never mentions the concepts of comparative advantage or gains from trade despite their importance in economists' arguments. Instead, he heaps ridicule on counterintuitive conclusions mostly by playing up just how counterintuitive they are. This isn't to say that Wilson is necessarily wrong here and economists are right. But it is to say that it's easy to win a debate when the other side's arguments don't get a fair hearing.

Finally, it has to be said that *Does Altruism Exist?* is marred by Wilson's tendency to self-aggrandizement. In places, for example, he indulges in cringe-inducing claims about how the theory of multilevel selection, like that of Copernicus, was once derided but is now accepted. And he relentlessly insists that his version of evolutionary theory is just what is needed to right our social arrangements and save the planet. It is, I suppose, formally possible that he's right about this. But there is precious little evidence of it in his book.

The unfortunate thing is that Wilson's attempt to extend evolutionary theory from biology to all society distracts from his real accomplishment. He, along with many others, has helped to make the logic of natural selection clearer. And that is something. Saving the planet isn't required. □

AFTER THE INAUGURATION, 2013

"Without the shedding of blood, there is no remission of sins."
—*Epistle to the Hebrews*, 9:22

Pulling from the tunnel at Union Station, our train shunts past D.C. offices and then crosses the rail bridge over the tidal Potomac blooming in sweeps of sunlight. Except for me and two young guys in suits studying spreadsheets on their laptops, and the tattooed girl curled asleep across two seats, and the coiffed blonde lady confined to her wheelchair up front next to piled luggage, it's mostly black folk, some trickling home in high spirits, bits of Inaugural bunting and patriotic ribbons swaying from their suitcase handles on the overhead racks, all of us riding the *Carolinian* south.

Further on, where it's suddenly sailboats and gulls on a nook of the Chesapeake, the banked-up rail bed cuts through miles of swamped pines and cypress as the train trundles past the odd heron stalking frogs, or, picking up speed, clatters through open cornfields where, for a few seconds, staring through the dirty glass, you can spot turkeys scrabbling the stubble. Further south, past Richmond, something like snow or frost glints off a field and you realize it's just been gleaned of cotton and this is indeed the South. As if to confirm this fact to all of us on Amtrak, some latter-day Confederate has raised the rebel battle flag in a field of winter wheat.

At dusk, just outside of Raleigh, the train slows and whistles three sharp calls at a crossing in Kittrell, N.C. Along the railroad tracks, under dark cedars, lie graves of Confederates from Petersburg's nine-month siege, men who survived neither battle, nor makeshift hospital at the Kittrell Springs Hotel, long gone from the town where our train now pauses for something up ahead.

Nearby in Oxford, in 1970, a black soldier was shot to death. One of his killers testified: "That nigger committed suicide, coming in here wanting to four-letter-word my daughter-in-law." Black vets, just back from Vietnam, set the town on fire. Off in the night, you could see the flames from these rails that once freighted cotton, slaves, and armies.

Now our Amtrak speeds by, passengers chatting, or snoozing, or just looking out as we flick on past the shut-down mills, shotgun shacks, collapsed tobacco barns, and the evening fields with their white chapels where "The Blood Done Sign My Name" is still sung, where the past hovers like smoke or a train whistle's mournful call.

—John Balaban

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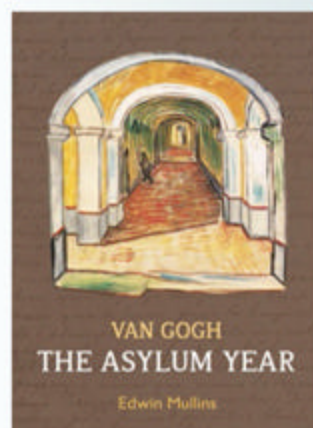
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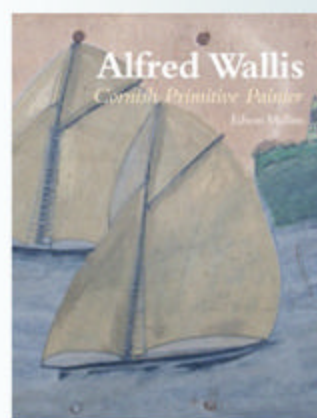
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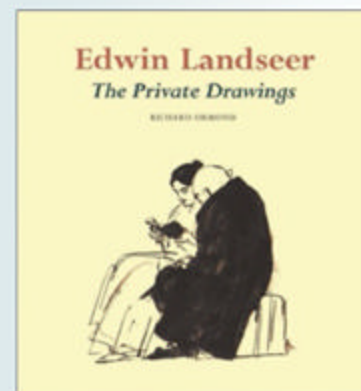
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The Civil War Convulsion

Andrew Delbanco

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by James Oakes.
Norton, 207 pp., \$23.95

The Civil War: Told by Those Who Lived It
edited by Brooks D. Simpson, Stephen W. Sears, and Aaron Sheehan-Dean.
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3,478 pp., \$157.50

1.

"The real war will never get in the books." This may be the most famous sentence ever written about the Civil War, at least by a writer of literary consequence. But what kind of reality did Walt Whitman have in mind when he made that claim more than 130 years ago? And considering the scores of thousands of Civil War books that have appeared since, how well has the prediction held up?

In the first place, he meant the reality he had seen, heard, and smelled while working as a nurse in a Union hospital: the sight of boys with worms burrowing into their wounds, the sound of their whispers as they dictated letters home, the smell of dysentery and gangrene mixed with chloroform and lime—all of which he tried to capture with phrases ("seething hell," "butchers' shambles," "slaughter house") whose lameness only made his point.

Even before its official start in 2011, the Civil War sesquicentennial has brought many attempts to prove Whitman wrong. There have been hour-to-hour accounts of the major battles, notably Allen Guelzo's *Gettysburg*; scholarly studies and popular biographies of key figures (Eric Foner on Lincoln, Michael Korda on Robert E. Lee); an "international history of the American Civil War" as a struggle between North and South for the allegiance of contending European powers (Don H. Doyle's *The Cause of All Nations*); assessments of the war's legal and literary ramifications (John Fabian Witt's *Lincoln's Code*, Randall Fuller's *From Battlefields Rising*); as well as sweeping narratives of events before, during, and after the war (David Goldfield's *America Aflame*, Brenda Wineapple's *Ecstatic Nation*).

But perhaps most striking is the surge of books that belong to what might be called the school of gore—exemplified most recently by Mark W. Smith's *The Smell of Battle, the Taste of Siege: A Sensory History of the Civil War*—books that almost seem to savor the range of ways in which living bodies were converted into corpses by fire

or disease, in mud or in bed, quickly enough to block awareness of death's arrival, or slowly enough to taunt the dying with false promises of reprieve. The rise of the genre can be dated to 2008, with the publication of Drew Gilpin Faust's *This Republic of Suffering*, from which we learn that after three days of fighting at Gettysburg in July 1863, "six million pounds of human and animal carcasses lay" rotting in the sun—a numerical measure to which Faust adds eyewitness accounts of "blackened bloated corpses with blood and gas protruding from every orifice, and maggots holding high carnival over their heads."

But Whitman also had in mind another reality: the jumble of grievances, ideals, and conflicting interests that provoked the war in the first place. These he tried to sum up, from the Northern point of view, as

the People, of their own choice, fighting, dying for their own idea, insolently attack'd by the secession-slave-power, . . . not for gain, nor even glory, nor to repel invasion—but for an emblem, a mere abstraction—for the life, the safety of the flag.

The compound phrase "secession-slave-power" was a slippery one—as if he couldn't decide whether the Civil War was about restoring the Union or destroying slavery, or, if it was some of both, what exactly was the relation between the two.

Many people in the North wanted to achieve the first without attempting the second. Early in the winter of 1861, the mayor of Brooklyn (not yet a borough of New York) encountered Whitman aboard the Fulton ferry and told him with suitable bluster that if only the Southern "fire-eaters would commit some overt act of resistance . . . they would then be at once so effectively squelched" that "we would never hear of secession again." He said nothing about slavery, at least as far as we know. Others hoped for more. After the mayor got his wish with South Carolina's artillery assault on Fort Sumter in April 1861, the Boston abolitionist Thomas Wentworth Higginson exulted that "War has flung the door wide open, and four million slaves stand ready to file through."

It was a prospect sufficiently alarming to conservative Unionists that one of them, Democratic representative William Holman of Indiana, rose in the House to offer a resolution by which he meant to shut the door. "The sole object of the Government, in its present and

future military operations," he said, "ought to be, to maintain the integrity of the Union . . . and the protection of the constitutional rights of the loyal citizens of every State"—by which he had chiefly in mind the right to own slaves.

As the war dragged on, its divergent purposes converged, vindicating Frederick Douglass's belief that by war would "be decided, and decided forever, which of the two, Freedom or

good on his pledge, he did so, according to some scholars, with reluctance overcome only by his conviction that slave labor was an asset of which the enemy must be deprived. No less a historian than Richard Hofstadter, writing in an iconoclastic mood in 1948, when Carl Sandburg's folksy Saint Abe still dominated the public mind, famously described the Emancipation Proclamation as having "all the moral grandeur of a bill of lading." This view of Lincoln's antislavery sentiment as cool and mostly tactical has been endorsed many times since—perhaps because it suits our incapacity to believe that any politician can be motivated by ideals as well as interests.

But two years ago the historian James Oakes, in what is arguably the most significant interpretative work to appear during the sesquicentennial, *Freedom National: The Destruction of Slavery in the United States, 1861–1865*, refuted the straitened view and argued that the Civil War was an abolition war from the start. Now, in a shorter book, *The Scorpion's Sting: Antislavery and the Coming of the Civil War*, Oakes has written a sort of prequel—showing how antebellum Republicans imagined a strategy for destroying slavery in which war was a last resort.

Freedom National recounted a series of ad hoc decisions whereby local field commanders, some with no previous history of antipathy to slavery, declined to return fugitive slaves to their masters. The first refusal came in June 1861, when General Benjamin Butler (later to become notorious as the Union commander in occupied New Orleans) received a petition from a Confederate officer for the return of three slaves who had fled to Butler's position at Fort Monroe in Hampton Roads, Virginia. There were practical reasons to treat such fugitives as captured "contraband"—namely, to deprive the enemy of their labor and to put them to

work for the Union. Improvised as it was, Butler's explanation had lasting implications. To the Virginian's request, submitted on the premise that the Fugitive Slave Law of 1850 required rendition of runaways, he gave a clipped reply that nicely summed up the new situation: "The fugitive-slave act did not affect a foreign country which Virginia claimed to be."

Here was precisely the reason why Republicans "assumed that the South would never secede," in Oakes's words: "Because that would mean war and with war came military emancipation." His point is that for slave owners, some of whom understood the point very

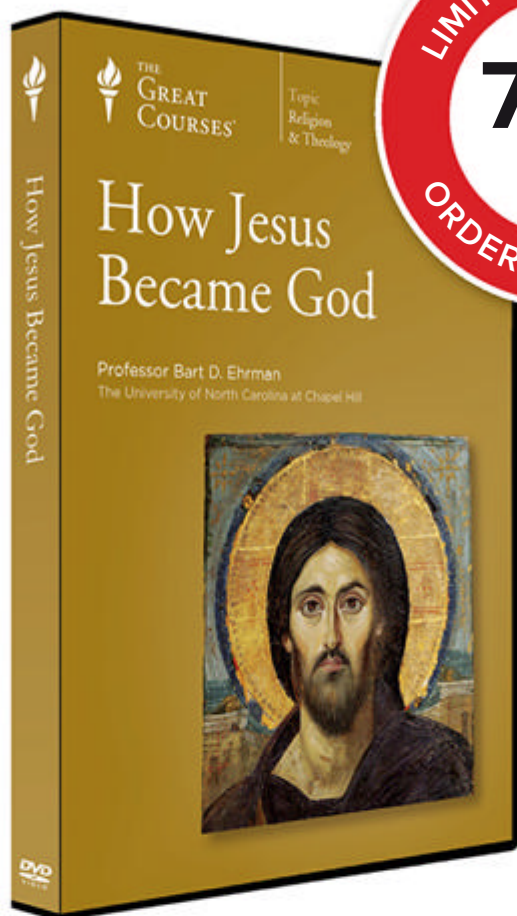


Winslow Homer: Young Soldier, 1864

Slavery, shall give law to this Republic." The convergence came despite President Lincoln's assurance to the South in his first inaugural address that his government would not interfere with slavery in states where it existed. As late as August 1862, in a letter to Horace Greeley, Lincoln wrote that "my paramount purpose in this struggle is to save the union, and is not either to save or to destroy slavery."

But even before composing that letter, Lincoln had drafted a preliminary proclamation warning that slaves in any state still in rebellion at the end of the year would be freed by executive order. When, on January 1, 1863, he made

*For a review of Foner's *The Fiery Trial: Abraham Lincoln and American Slavery*, see James M. McPherson, "The Transformation of Abraham Lincoln," *The New York Review*, November 25, 2010, and for Goldfield, see McPherson, "What Drove the Terrible War?," *The New York Review*, July 14, 2011. Additional footnotes appear in the Web version of this review at www.nybooks.com.



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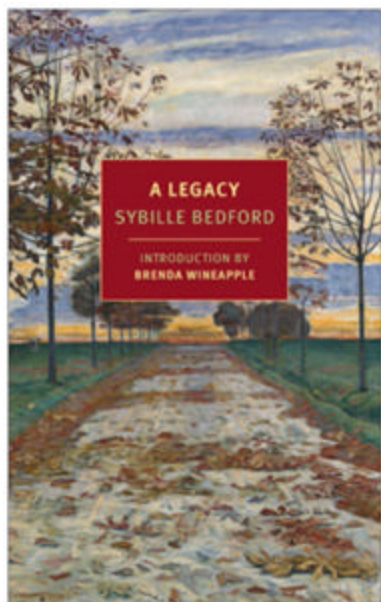
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well, war was a staggering mistake, because the protection they enjoyed during peacetime—the almost universally accepted constitutional principle that the federal government had no authority over slavery in states whose laws allowed it—was utterly destroyed the instant the North decided to put down secession by force. Once the first shots were fired, emancipation was only a matter of time.

Why, then, did the South take the risk? This is where Oakes makes a distinctive contribution—by reconstructing the antislavery strategy that, in his view, forced slave owners into rebellion even at the risk of losing everything they were determined to defend. In Oakes's telling, the Republican plan went something like this. First, slavery would be banned from territories regulated by Congress. This was the main plank of the Republican platform on which Lincoln was elected, and the policy that was most noxious to the South. Republicans also planned to obstruct enforcement of the Fugitive Slave Law, and thereby to encourage slaves to flee to freedom.

On this point, Lincoln was ambiguous in his first inaugural address, in which he halfheartedly endorsed that law, but Oakes reads the speech as undermining more than supporting it. Abolition of slavery in the District of Columbia was also part of the strategy, whereby freedom would be brought to the doorstep of the South. (Abolition was indeed achieved in the capital, but not until April 1862, when the war had been going on for a year.) Finally, Oakes cites Republican determination to hunt down and prosecute slave traders who violated the ban on the international slave trade, and even to extend the ban to coastal waterways.

By these cumulative steps slavery would be surrounded by a "cordon of freedom"—contained, cornered, and choked until, "like a scorpion girt by fire" (a metaphor commonly invoked at the time), it would go into its final frenzy and sting itself to death. Forced suicide was the denouement of the plan. As slave property in the upper South became insecure and the market for slaves showed signs of imminent collapse, slave owners in the border states would start selling off their human property. With western territories entering the Union as free states, Republican control of Congress (as well as the presidency, and eventually the Supreme Court) would be assured. Even in the deep South, slave owners would see the writing on the wall and give up the unwinnable fight—suing, in effect, for peace before war had begun.

This version of the Republican Party's position has a certain implausible unity, and Oakes writes, perhaps, with a touch of nostalgia for a time when political parties had coherent platforms and stuck, as it were, to their guns. In retrospect, any expectation that slavery could, at least for many years, be driven down a path to "ultimate extinction" (a phrase used by Lincoln and others) by a combination of external and internal pressure seems improbable. Recent scholars such as Sven Beckert (*Empire of Cotton*, 2014), Walter Johnson (*River of Dark Dreams*, 2013), and Edward Baptist (*The Half Has Never Been Told*, 2014) emphasize the expansionist ambitions of slave owners, who dreamed of a slave dominion stretch-

ing not only westward but southward to Cuba and into the Caribbean. The slave power was not about to give up without a fight. If an older generation of historians once regarded slavery as a failing system by which the South was sliding into quasi-colonial dependency on the industrial North, younger scholars tend to stress the huge capital investment slavery represented and the enormous profits it yielded to large-scale owners with decisive political power, especially in the deep South.

All this might seem to render Oakes's version of the Republican strategy a fanciful one. But he takes us into an antebellum world where passions and panic on both sides rose beyond the reach of rationality. He shows how and why the war came as a surprise to Northerners who never thought the South would leave the Union or stay out of it for long, and as a shock to Southerners who never thought the North would actually fight



Winslow Homer: Sounding Reveille, 1865

("orators of the South," General William T. Sherman recalled in his memoir, "used, openly and constantly, the expressions that there would be no war, and that a lady's thimble would hold all the blood to be shed").

Although he never quite says so explicitly, Oakes seems to agree with the Republican view that "wartime emancipation imposed by the military was always an option, but nobody thought it was a particularly good way to abolish slavery." Indeed some of the most rhetorically belligerent Republicans were pacifists at heart. Charles Sumner, for one, declared with characteristic absolutism in 1845, when war was looming with Mexico over the expansionist ambitions of Texas, that "there can be no peace that is not honorable: there can be no war that is not dishonorable." Fifteen years later, representing Massachusetts in the United States Senate, Sumner discovered an honorable war.

But after 150 years and millions of pages of commentary, how honorable does the Civil War appear to us now? Was it a lamentable necessity, or the horrific price of political failure? Was it avertable, or, in William H. Seward's memorable phrase, an "irrepressible conflict"? Historians who belong to the school of gore tend to evade these questions by retreating behind descriptive accounts of the savagery—though some, like Harry Stout, in *Upon the Altar of the Nation: A Moral History of the Civil War* (2006), have more or less condemned the war on pacifist grounds, and at least one, David Goldfield, in *America Aflame* (2011), says without

embarrassment that he is "anti-war, particularly the Civil War," because he believes that "the political system established by the Founders would have been resilient and resourceful enough" to solve the problem of slavery without plunging the nation into an ocean of death, and inciting the bitter racial animus whose long career is in some respects not yet over.

About such musings, one can only say, who knows? What I do know is that reading Oakes in conjunction with Faust and her followers is an oddly unsettling experience. He writes about the war with a distinctive combination of satisfaction and sorrow—as the scourge (Lincoln's word) that finally delivered on the long-deferred promise of emancipation, but also as the tragic failure to find an alternative path to emancipation through politics. One finds oneself cheering and cringing at once—glad for the folly of the South in deciding to

secede, since no one can say how long it would have taken to rid the nation of slavery if war had not furnished the means, but stunned by the scale of the dying (the latest estimate is three quarters of a million, roughly equivalent to eight million in proportion to today's population), and hoping, as if watching a tragedy watched many times before, that the plot could somehow be revised to spare the numberless young from their predestined doom.

2.

With the sesquicentennial winding down—closing day is April 9, the anniversary of Lee's surrender at Appomattox—the task of writing Civil War history with due respect for its moral complexity is as challenging as ever. And perhaps the biggest challenge is to recover some sense of how the world looked in prospect to those who lived without our retrospective knowledge.

What, they must have wondered, if Lee had broken through at Gettysburg to threaten Washington? What if, as Lincoln expected, George McClellan had won the presidency on a peace platform in 1864, and the South had returned to the Union with slavery intact?

For generally good reasons, historians do not like to get entangled in such counterfactual speculation—but to exclude all thoughts of an alternative past is to lose contact with how it felt to peer into the inscrutable future. And so one is grateful for what may

be the most valuable scholarly work yet to appear during the sesquicentennial—the four-volume anthology of Civil War writings, published by the Library of America since 2011 at the pace of one volume per year. To read through these pages is to experience something like walking through a museum without benefit of text panels or audio tour. Each volume opens with a short introduction summarizing the main events of the year, and concludes with chronologies, biographical, textual, and brief explanatory notes—just enough to give some context but barely a hint of interpretation. As the great Civil War scholar David Potter once wrote, “hindsight [is] the historian’s chief asset and his main liability.” This is Civil War history without hindsight.

And so, immersed in the rush of events, we witness the war beginning in a mood of collective insouciance. In Charleston, ladies went out under their parasols to watch the shelling of Fort Sumter, and one wrote in her diary that “after all that noise and our tears and prayers, nobody has been hurt,” as if she wanted a refund for tickets to a disappointing show. When news of the attack reached Whitman’s New York, volunteers marched down Broadway with dangles of rope hanging from their guns to symbolize their intent to bring back rebel prisoners like trussed hogs.

But once the war got going in earnest, an impassable gulf opened up between observers and participants, as when Sam Watkins, who served the Confederacy in the First Tennessee Regiment, writes: “Now, if you wish, kind reader, to find out how many were killed and

wounded, I refer you to the histories.” Professing ignorance of what the reader wants to know, he adds, “I do not pretend to give you figures, and describe how this General looked and how that one spoke, and the other one charged with drawn sabre.”

He writes of an officer “with both eyes shot out” who was found “rambling in a briar-patch.” Who lived and who died seemed a matter of chance:

We helped bring off a man by the name of Hodge, with his under jaw shot off, and his tongue lolling out. We brought off Captain Lute B. Irvine. Lute was shot through the lungs and was vomiting blood all the while, and begging us to lay him down and let him die. But Lute is living yet.

This writing anticipates what Edmund Wilson called in *Patriotic Gore*, his great literary history of the war, “the chastening of American prose style” that became manifest in the work of such Civil War veterans as Ambrose Bierce and John W. DeForest—writers who realized, long before Hemingway (chastened by a later war), that “abstract words such as glory, honor, courage, or hallow were obscene beside the concrete names of villages, the numbers of roads, the names of rivers, the numbers of regiments and the dates.” This kind of stylistic stringency, usually associated with such twentieth-century writers as Sherwood Anderson and Hemingway himself, is already evident throughout this anthology—a self-censoring style that reports facts and impressions with minimal inter-

pretation. It is writing that shuts out concepts while delivering sensations—fear, relief, exhaustion, boredom, restlessness—on the premise that larger meanings are retrospective impositions, impertinent and inconceivable to men in chronic shock.

We are reminded, too, of how everyone’s war was a private war circumscribed by unsharable memories, and by the fact, as Wilbur Fisk, a Vermont schoolteacher who sent scores of letters from the front to his hometown newspaper, wrote, that a soldier’s “circle of observation is very limited. He sees but little of what is going on, and takes a part in still less.” Each side was convinced that it was fighting a just war, but each side faced the question of how to wage the war justly with the new technologies.

General Sherman was outraged to learn that “the rebels had planted eight-inch shells in the road, with friction-matches to explode them by being trodden on. This was not war, but murder, and it made me very angry.” With symmetrical indignation, young Watkins reports “one of the most shameful and cowardly acts of Yankee treachery” when a Union sniper, using one of the new rifles with long-distance accuracy, shot a Confederate soldier who had crawled out to give water to a wounded Yankee lying in no-man’s-land. We get, too, a vivid sense of the uncertainty, misapprehension, and mutual ignorance that envelops both sides, as when Confederate troops mistake the Connecticut flag for a flag of truce and walk into a slaughter.

While the anthology is especially valuable for yielding hints of what ordinary soldiers (if any soldier can be said to be ordinary) experienced, it is also a rewarding supplement to political histories that rely on the papers of political leaders, some of which are also included here. The story of Lincoln’s cautious advance toward emancipation, for example, is illuminated in selections from his public writings, as well as in a private letter from Hannah Johnson, the mother of a black Union soldier, who urges the president to stand by the Emancipation Proclamation: “When you are dead and in Heaven, in a thousand years that action of yours will make the Angels sing your praises I know it.”

Another text, buried in the endnotes of the third volume, is from Lieutenant John Garland of the 42nd New York Infantry, who denounces the proclamation as unconstitutional and calls the “hearts” of Lincoln and his henchmen “blacker than the ‘nigger’ they are fighting for.” One comes away with a heightened sense of how narrow a path Lincoln had to follow.

Since the editors favor short excerpts, I miss more extended works such as Oliver Wendell Holmes’s “My Hunt After the Captain” (1862), in which Holmes reprints the telegram by which he was informed, with an economy that seems a preview of today’s tweets, that his son (the future Supreme Court justice) has been wounded at Antietam:

HAGERSTOWN 17th

To Dr. Holmes
Capt Holmes wounded shot through



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the neck thought not mortal at Keedysville

WILLIAM G. LEDUC

Here is Dr. Holmes's recollection of his reaction:

Through the neck,—no bullet left in wound. Windpipe, food-pipe, carotid, jugular, half a dozen smaller, but still formidable ves-

sels, a great braid of nerves, each as big as a lamp-wick, spinal cord,—ought to kill at once, if at all. *Thought not* mortal, or *not thought* mortal,—which was it? The first; that is better than the second would be.—“Keedysville, a post-office, Washington Co., Maryland.” Leduc? Leduc? Don't remember that name.—The boy is waiting for his money. A dollar and thirteen cents. Has nobody got

thirteen cents? Don't keep that boy waiting,—how do we know what messages he has got to carry?

So much is conveyed in these fragmentary sentences: the hyperrational mind trying desperately to parse the phrases, the frantic focus on his own son, the anxiety at keeping the telegraph boy from proceeding on his appointed rounds, carrying news to other fathers dreading news of other sons.

Any anthologist's decision about what to put in and what to leave out is subject to second-guessing. But anyone who reads this collection will find in it a treasury of evidence, as one Union officer puts it, that “there is much that is beautiful as well as sad in these bloody events.” These books bring us as close to the “real war” as we are ever likely to get, while revealing the untraversable distance still to go. □

Samuel Beckett: The Private Voice

Fintan O'Toole

Echo's Bones

by Samuel Beckett,
edited by Mark Nixon.
Grove, 121 pp., \$22.00

Georges Pelorson, who was a close friend of Samuel Beckett's, recalled a walk they took together in Phoenix Park in Dublin in 1929 or 1930, when Beckett was twenty-three or twenty-four:

After a few hundred yards I noticed Sam was walking almost like a duck. I said to him “What's the matter with you, are your feet hurting?” and he said “yes.” “Why, are you tired?” and he answered “No it's my shoes. They're too tight.” “Well, why don't you change them?” I got no answer or rather I got it years later.

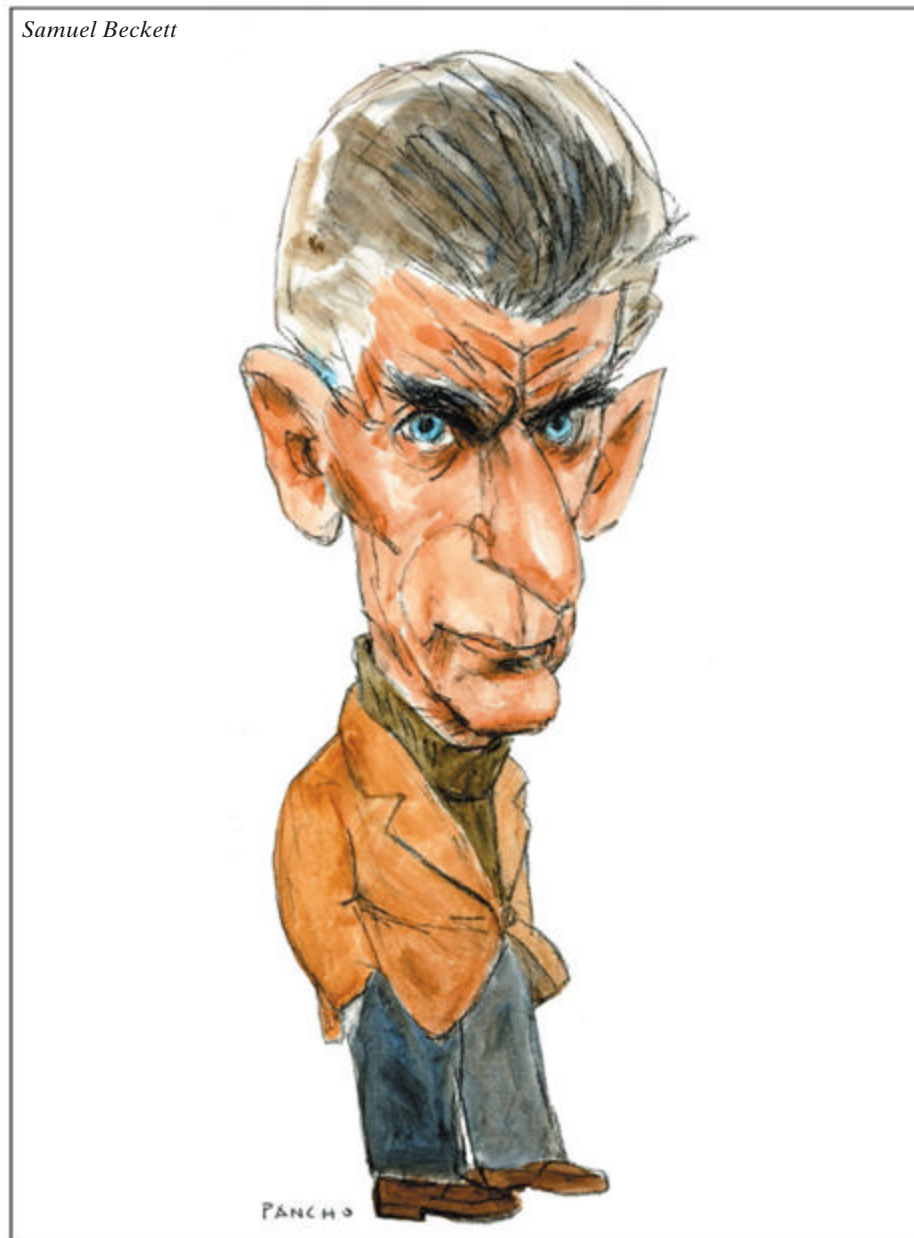
The answer came when Pelorson met Beckett in Paris with James Joyce. Joyce was wearing “extraordinary shoes of a blistering canary yellow.” Pelorson had his answer to the mystery of Beckett's sore feet:

Sam was sitting nearby and as I was looking at him all of a sudden I realized that his shoes were exactly the same size as Joyce's, though evidently his feet were not.... Of course, at the time he was really haunted by Joyce, imitating him in all his most characteristic attitudes, dressing like him, eating the same food as him, holding himself like him.¹

In the early 1930s, the young Beckett was trying, with sometimes painful results, to walk in Joyce's shoes. “Echo's Bones,” a long story written in 1933 but never published until now, matters because it shows him beginning to walk in his own. It helps us to see Beckett becoming Beckett—a development of some importance in the genealogy of twentieth-century literature.

In its external circumstances, “Echo's Bones” is deliciously Beckettian: a rejected appendage to an abject failure. Twenty-five years later, in his play *Krapp's Last Tape*, Beckett created a version of himself as he might

Samuel Beckett



have been if he had not escaped from Joyce's shadow: a crapulous ex-writer tethered to the pomposities of his past. Having listened to his own voice from decades before, pontificating about his great literary opus, Krapp dryly undercuts its pretensions:

Seventeen copies sold, of which eleven at trade price to free circulating libraries beyond the seas. Getting known. [*Pause.*] One pound six and something, eight I have little doubt.

The book in question is undoubtedly Beckett's first creative work, a collection of ten linked stories, *More Pricks Than Kicks*, published by Chatto and Windus in London in May 1934, when the author was twenty-seven. “Seventeen copies sold” is comic deflation, but

More Pricks was a woeful flop nonetheless. By March 1935, it had sold 377 copies. Thereafter until 1946 it continued to sell at an average rate of two copies a year.² “Getting known” is a perfect example of the mature Beckett's deadpan economy of laughable misery.

“Echo's Bones” fared even worse: it did not rise to this level of public failure. The story behind it is almost worthy in itself of a small Beckett drama: a glimmer of hope giving way to a bleakly funny exercise in futility. In September 1933 Charles Prentice accepted *More Pricks* for publication by Chatto. He wrote four days later to suggest a final story to bulk up the vol-

ume: “Another 10,000 words, or even 5,000 for that matter, would, I am sure, help the book, and it would be lovely if you could manage to reel them out.” Beckett did not reel anything out: he agonized over the additional story, “Echo's Bones,” all through October and early November, eventually sending Prentice 13,500 words. Prentice promised to “read it with delight over this weekend.” He did read it but with a good deal more dismay than delight. He wrote to Beckett:

Dear Sam,

It is a nightmare.... It gives me the jim-jams.... Do you mind if we leave it out of the book—that is, publish “More Pricks Than Kicks” in the original form in which you sent it in? ... “Echo's Bones” would, I am sure, lose the book a great many readers. People will shudder and be puzzled and confused; and they won't be keen on analysing the shudder. I am certain that “Echo's Bones” would depress the sales very considerably.

Beckett quickly agreed with Prentice's judgment and withdrew the new story. The comic irony is perfect: *More Pricks*, as it turned out, didn't need its missing adjunct to depress its sales. In spite of some half-admiring reviews, the book sank into obscurity, not least in Beckett's own mind. In a letter in 1959, he told Barbara Bray that he remembered only two of the ten stories:

Wouldn't open *More Pricks* for a king's ransom. I remember Yellow vaguely, and Dante and the Lobster, the others not at all, not a clue. Glad you got something from them, don't know how you do it.

After he became famous, he had to be badgered into allowing the stories to reappear, telling Barney Rosset in 1964 that

I have broken down half way through galleys of *More Pricks Than Kicks*. I simply can't bear it. It was a ghastly mistake on my part to imagine, not having looked at it for a quarter of a century, that this old shit was revivable.

He seems essentially to have written the book off as juvenilia, warning the then-young Irish novelist Aidan Higgins in 1958 against “the silly mistake we all make of publishing too soon.”

¹Georges Belmont, “Remembering Sam,” in *Beckett in Dublin*, edited by S.E. Wilmer (Lilliput Press, 1992), pp. 114–115. Pelorson, a Vichy collaborator, was blacklisted after the Liberation and changed his name to Belmont.

²John Pilling collates the figures in *Samuel Beckett's 'More Pricks Than Kicks': In a Strait of Two Wills* (Continuum, 2011), p. 3.

If this was true for *More Pricks*, it was even more so for its abandoned orphan, “Echo’s Bones.” When Beckett eventually relented and allowed *More Pricks* to be republished in the UK in 1970 and published for the first time in the US in 1972, there seems to have been no question of rescuing the rejected eleventh story. It was known to scholars from a typescript in Dartmouth College and its carbon copy in the University of Texas at Austin, but Beckett had so definitively consigned it to the scrapheap that he recycled the title for his 1935 collection of poems, *Echo’s Bones and Other Precipitates*.

And yet there are reasons to see this forgetting of “Echo’s Bones” less as a retrospective judgment on its quality and more as the repression of a painful memory. For all his immediate compliance with Charles Prentice’s suggestion that it be dropped, Beckett was clearly hurt. He wrote to his closest friend, Thomas McGreevy, three weeks after Prentice’s rejection of the story:

I haven’t been doing anything. Charles’s fouting à la porte of Echo’s Bones, the last story, into which I put all I knew and plenty that I was better still aware of, discouraged me profoundly....

These are strong statements from a reticent man. That Beckett put all he knew into “Echo’s Bones” is not necessarily significant for his later development: immature writers tend to put all they know into their work, withholding too little. In the case of the twenty-seven-year-old Beckett, this is indeed the problem: the *More Pricks* stories are so dense with showy allusions that they can occasionally verge on the unreadable. (“Echo’s Bones” is published with forty-eight pages of original text and fifty-six pages of Mark Nixon’s all-too-indispensable explanatory annotations.)

It is easy to understand why the later Beckett, who built his aesthetic on what is not said and not known, should have had so little use for them. What really matters in “Echo’s Bones,” however, is that he also put in “plenty that I was better still aware of”—the things he did not know but sensed and felt and struggled to articulate. In this story, he is beginning to sense the path toward his own way of walking—that persistent, pointless, but strangely heroic trudge through the valley of the shadow of death that will be the trajectory of his mature work.

It is too glib to suggest that Beckett before “Echo’s Bones” is merely imitating Joyce and certainly far too sweeping to claim that he is free from his master after it: it will be another four years before he can write to McGreevy, in January 1938, that “I don’t feel the danger of the association [with Joyce] any more. He is just a very lovable human being.” Yet there is no mistaking the extent to which Beckett’s previous work is an attempt to grapple with the work of his fellow Dubliner. He himself was intensely conscious of his position as an acolyte, not least because he had made his first appearance in print as a precocious twenty-three-year-old disciple, one of the John the Baptists chosen by Joyce to herald *Work in Progress* (later known as *Finnegans Wake*) in *Our Exagmination Round*

His Factification for Incamination of Work in Progress, etc. When he sent the story that first introduces Belacqua, the antihero of the ten pieces that make up *More Pricks Than Kicks* and also of “Echo’s Bones,” to Prentice in 1931, he half-apologized that “of course it stinks of Joyce in spite of most earnest endeavours to endow it with my own odours.”

The simplest way to grasp the difficulty of this act of literary fumigation is to remember how greatly Belacqua differs from what he is supposed to be. The character’s name is derived from the Florentine lute-maker in Canto IV of Dante’s *Purgatorio* who is too lazy to try to ascend from Purgatory into Paradise. Dante calls him “more indolent than if sloth were his sister.” Beckett’s idea seems to be that he should form a static counterpoint to the constant motion of Joyce’s characters. In the *More Pricks* stories, Belacqua is called “sinfully indolent, bogged in indolence, asking nothing better than to stay put”; “an indolent bourgeois poltroon”; and a character “acting with insufficient motivation.” Beckett’s notion is clearly of a stagnant protagonist like Ivan Goncharov’s Oblomov—a figure he will indeed go on to create in his novel *Murphy*, published in 1938.

But Belacqua cannot adhere to this plan: he is in fact as restlessly mobile as Joyce’s characters are, turning up in all four compass points of Dublin and its environs. He cannot “stay put”: his desire for immobility is canceled by “his anxiety to keep on the move and his distress at finding himself brought to a standstill.” When he is not walking, he is usually driving. Beckett wants to write a book of stasis but he cannot occupy the Dublin territory that Joyce has mapped so minutely without falling into the peripatetic motion of Stephen Dedalus and Leopold Bloom.

Equally, Beckett is consciously using other influences to arm himself against Joyce—most unexpectedly that of Henry Fielding, whose interruptions and digressions he mimics in a way that is antithetical to Joyce’s rigorous eschewal of open authorial intervention. The four-volume *Journals of Jules Renard* (published between 1887 and 1910), which he was reading constantly and from which he stole whole phrases, gave him access to a voice of bitter pessimism that was similarly far removed from Joyce’s all-knowing, all-forgiving manner. Jeremy Taylor’s seventeenth-century devotional manuals, *Holy Living* and *Holy Dying*, which Beckett also raids, provide a Protestant counterweight to Joyce’s Catholic inflections.

Even with these arms, however, it is still Joyce with whom he has to battle and he is not yet sure how to conduct the fight. At some points in *More Pricks*, he succumbs to clever but unconvincing imitation. “The Smeraldina’s Billet Doux,” a story in the form of a letter from one of the women with whom Belacqua becomes entangled, is heavily indebted to Molly Bloom: a breathless, guileless rush of erotic thoughts in the first-person voice of a highly sexualized woman. It is notable because no such voice would appear in Beckett again until he wrote *Happy Days* twenty-five years later, but it is in itself too patronizing to be convincing. At other times, he tries to conduct his struggle with Joyce through parody. Belacqua himself, from his unlikely name to his

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status as an emotionally underdeveloped poet and intellectual, can be read as a burlesque of Stephen Dedalus.

The long story "A Wet Night" takes on Joyce's own most famous story, "The Dead." It is set around a Christmas Eve party in Dublin at which songs and recitations are performed and, in case the reader misses the impudence of the challenge, it has an obvious pastiche of the celebrated closing paragraph of "The Dead" in which snow is "falling on every part of the dark central plain, on the treeless hills, falling softly upon the Bog of Allen and, farther westward, softly falling into the dark mutinous Shannon waves."

Beckett instead has rain that "fell upon the bay, the littoral, the mountains and the plains, and notably upon the Central Bog it fell with a rather desolate uniformity." The gesture here is one of rebellious mockery: the rain is a bleakly mock-heroic parody of Joyce's beautiful snow. But as a gesture, it is unconvincing: the passage is not especially brilliant in itself and the promise it implies—that Beckett will be even more realistic than the ultra-realist Joyce—is not one he can fulfill. He is never going to expunge the odor of Joyce by being more gritty and grounded than the great master of physical detail. He needs something else and in "Echo's Bones" we can begin to see the forces that will shape that something: cruelty, death, and persistence.

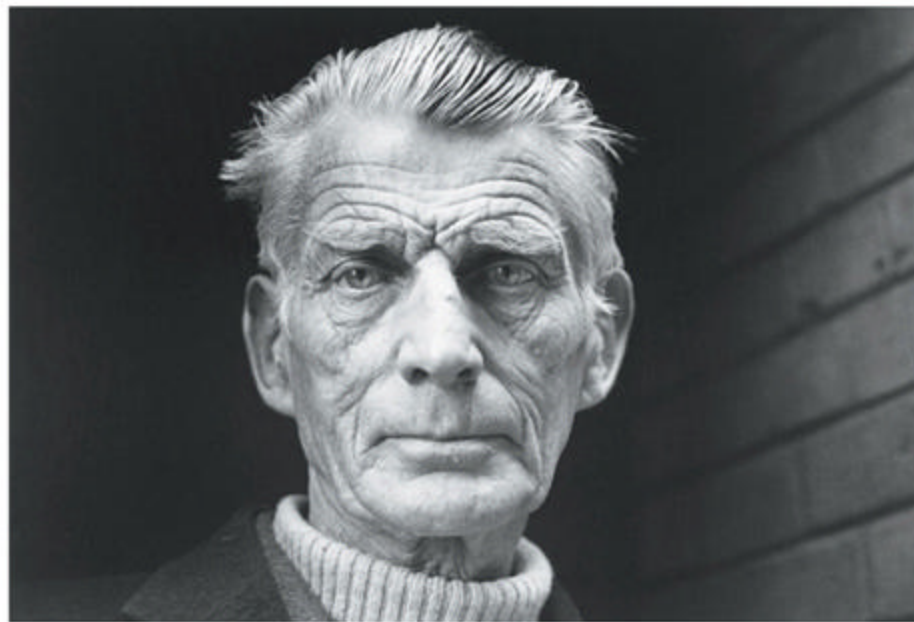
In the penultimate story of *More Pricks Than Kicks*, Belacqua dies as a result of a routine operation that gets botched. In order to write "Echo's Bones," Beckett had to bring him back from the dead to haunt the graveyard where he is buried, making the story a strange afterpiece to the nineteenth-century Irish gothic tradition of Sheridan Le Fanu and Bram Stoker. The narrator describes the tale as a "little triptych." In the first part, the resurrected Belacqua encounters a prostitute, Zaborvna Privet. In the second, the giant Lord Gall of Wormwood, who is unable to father a child with his syphilitic wife, asks Belacqua to perform in his place so that he does not die intestate. In the final section, Belacqua meets a gardener who is in the act of robbing his grave, while one of his former lovers, now dead, appears in a submarine to gather and transport the souls of the departed.

It is not hard to see why poor Charles Prentice feared that readers would "shudder and be puzzled and confused." The narrative structure is loose, picaresque, and fantastical. The language is so dense with allusions that at times it defeats even Nixon's assiduous sleuthing for sources. Resort to his copious annotations is a constant necessity but even with them, it is impossible to parse a passage like "Gnaeni, the pranic bleb, is far from being a mandrake. His leprechaun lets him out about this time every Sunday. They have no conduction." Here, the odor of Joyce at his most gnomish has turned sour. Yet "Echo's Bones" is much more vigorous and engaging than these descriptions might suggest. Behind its tangled thickets and elaborate façades, there are two potent human realities that Beckett is "aware of" but does not "know": sexual confusion and grief.

A dark, anguished sexuality runs all through *More Pricks* and becomes even darker in "Echo's Bones." Osten-

sibly, Belacqua has a series of heterosexual relationships with women—he marries three of them in sequence. But the *More Pricks* stories are most deeply interested in sterility and in forms of sex that cannot lead to procreation. When Belacqua has sex with a woman in "Love and Lethe," she is terminally ill and their mutual excitement comes from the failure of a suicide pact. His marriage to one of his wives, Lucy, is sexless because she has suffered severe injuries in an accident—a situation he finds entirely congenial. We learn late in the collection that his own second name is Shuah—that of the mother of the biblical Onan, who spills his seed on the ground. And in "Walking Out," Lucy discovers, before their marriage, that Belacqua is a voyeur who spies on a courting couple in the woods near his home.

These anxieties about sex are ratch-



Samuel Beckett, 1976; photograph by Jane Bown

eted up several notches in "Echo's Bones," which is shot through both with Belacqua's fears about being raped and with references to homosexual and sadomasochistic practices. When he encounters Zaborvna Privet, she turns into a rapacious Gorgon. He goes with her to her lodging where he "to his astonishment was ravished." In the second part, Belacqua is again ravished, at least metaphorically, by the giant Lord Gall, who sticks his head between Belacqua's legs in order to lift him forcibly onto his shoulders: "But this, this rape, this contempt of his person, this violation... really it was not to be endured."

Meanwhile, Beckett draws heavily on two obscure nineteenth-century books—Dr. Pierre Garnier's *Onanisme seul et à deux* and Reverend William Cooper's *Flagellation and the Flagellants: A History of the Rod*—for phrases and references. When we first meet the revenant Belacqua, he is sitting on the graveyard fence "bent double... like a casse-poitaine," a term Nixon helpfully glosses as "the active partner in homosexual fellatio." Lord Gall's wife's lover is Baron Extravas, a name that comes from a phrase in Garnier listing three forms of nonreproductive sex: "extravas, ab ore, parte poste"—outside the vessel, by mouth, from behind. Repeated references to flagellants and their victims pepper the story.

All of this might be material for (aptly sterile) speculation about Beckett's own sexuality in this period, but its essential significance is aesthetic. Over time, Beckett's work will lose the misogynistic impulse that expresses itself in so many ugly and fearful images of

women, but his interest in sadomasochism will be transformed into an artistic method. The mature Beckett practices a kind of controlled, consensual cruelty on his readers and audiences. His great novels and plays torment us with the knowledge that they will refuse to yield the satisfaction of semantic release. They defy us to stop reading, to get up and leave the theater. But at the same time they hold us by their mesmerizing artistry. We laugh at our compliance, as when, after an excruciatingly tedious sequence of meaningless actions in *Endgame*, Clov turns his telescope on the audience and announces, "I see... a multitude... in transports... of joy." Even as we laugh, we recognize our bondage.

The mature Beckett does not tell us that people persist through torments—he gives us this experience. And in

rustle./ They murmur... To have lived is not enough for them./ They have to talk about it./ To be dead is not enough for them./ It is not sufficient." In "Echo's Bones," we find Beckett listening for the first time to the rustling and murmurs of those who go on talking because being dead is not enough for them. The story's title comes from Ovid's nymph Echo, whose bones turn to stone but whose voice lingers on. This will be one of the great recurring ideas of Beckett's mature work—the flow of language that is not stopped by death.

This idea hardly arose in 1933 merely because Prentice asked for another story. The need to revive Belacqua forced Beckett to deal in his own oblique way with the thoughts of death that had surrounded him that year. In the ten months before he wrote "Echo's Bones," mortality pressed in on him. At the end of 1932, he was in the hospital for operations on his neck and foot: we know from the (paradoxically vivid) penultimate story in *More Pricks*, "Yellow," which closely follows that experience, that he was afraid of dying under the anesthetic, the fate that befalls Belacqua in the book. In May 1933, when he was back in hospital for another operation, his first cousin Peggy Sinclair, with whom he had once been infatuated (she is the model for Smeraldina in *More Pricks*), died suddenly in Germany. A month later, Beckett's beloved father William, who was just sixty-one, died of a heart attack.

It is no great stretch to suggest that his father's death, and his own unprocessed feelings about it, form the emotional setting for "Echo's Bones": the graveyard haunted by the returned Belacqua, set between the sea and the mountains, is clearly Redfern cemetery in Greystones, County Wicklow, where William had just been interred and the undertaker said to have buried Belacqua, Nichols, did the same office for Beckett's father. It is unsurprising that Hamlet, the archetypal son haunted by his dead father, is a point of reference in the story.

It is grief—and the attempts to mock and defy it—that gives to "Echo's Bones" a quality beyond Beckett's precocious cleverness. There is a new note of Dantesque beauty in the opening paragraph:

The dead die hard, they are trespassers on the beyond, they must take the place as they find it, the shafts and manholes back into the muck, till such time as the lord of the manor incurs through his long acquiescence a duty of care in respect of them.

The whole story can be read as an extended fantasy in which death itself is rendered negligible, or as Belacqua puts it, "I sometimes wonder whether death is not the greatest swindle of modern times." If Belacqua's ghost has any message it is that "One: no lives can be dropped. Two: you can't cut off the entail." Therein lies the seed of Beckett's mature work, in which even the most minimal of lives refuses to be dropped and even the dead refuse to be cut off in their incessant flow of speech. When his father died, Beckett wrote to McGreevy: "I can't write about him, I can only walk the fields and climb the ditches after him." But perhaps in following his father's footsteps, Beckett found a way to begin to walk in his own shoes. □

The Good Patriots

Alan Ryan

Moral Imagination

by David Bromwich.
Princeton University Press,
350 pp., \$27.95

1.

A sound instinct prompted David Bromwich to publish *Moral Imagination* at the same time as his biography of Edmund Burke, and not only because the idea of “a moral imagination” is derived from Burke.¹ These essays were written between 1995 and 2012, and although Burke is not the central figure in them, they shed much light on the frame of mind in which Bromwich approached the ambiguous figure of Burke in his biography, and even more on how Bromwich is relevant to the politics of our own times. He has been a fierce, not to say a savage, critic of both President Obama and his predecessor in the White House; but his essays on the exemplary figure of Lincoln reprinted here remind us that Bromwich thinks it anything but impossible to provide moral leadership in difficult conditions—extreme conditions are difficult in many ways, but one of them is in offering too many temptations to behave in cruel and immoral ways.

The book begins with the essay on moral imagination that provides its title, and ends with a chapter of “Comments on Perpetual War,” a sequence of short and savage essays on enthusiasts for the war on terror from William Safire to Dick Cheney. They end with a rousing defense of Edward Snowden’s whistle-blowing that only slightly tempers the chilling reminder that the National Security Administration has an ability to uncover the secrets of every citizen that the Stasi only dreamed of in Communist East Germany. It is hard to believe that either the judiciary or elected politicians can be relied on to police our own domestic spies when the spies possess, if they care to use it, the same hold over their supposed masters as J. Edgar Hoover held over his. Not that a majority of the judiciary or politicians seems disposed to attempt the task in the first place.

The scope of *Moral Imagination* is wider than such essays may suggest: the morality of war features prominently, but that is because a central figure of the book is Abraham Lincoln, whose reluctant resort to force and unwillingness to demonize his slaveholding foes contrast so sharply with the enthusiasm for a war against the “bad guys” displayed by the Bush administration. The title is drawn from a famous passage in Edmund Burke’s *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790). Burke was appalled by the treatment of Marie-Antoinette, who had been dragged from her bedchamber at Versailles and forced to return to Paris along with her husband, Louis XVI.

The event led Burke to lament that

“the age of chivalry is gone.” Responding to the French revolutionaries’ contempt for chivalry and their desire to make the world over in a new and more rational form, he wrote:

All the decent drapery of life is to be rudely torn off. All the super-added ideas, furnished from the wardrobe of a moral imagination, which the heart owns, and the understanding ratifies, as necessary to cover the defects of our naked

narrow our sympathies. Communitarian thinkers such as Michael Walzer and Charles Taylor, who emphasize the moral authority of our culture, are by no means political conservatives, but they can be accused of too readily seeing the good in things that radicals are dubious about. They are respectful of ethnic and religious attachments in particular. That, in Bromwich’s view, narrows the moral imagination.

The second topic is the question of character: the qualities of temperament

suggests personal animus or that Bromwich believes that Americans are more prone than anyone else to imperial self-deception. They have, he suggests, succumbed to imperial fantasies because they have since 1989 been vastly more powerful than anyone else and faced with more temptation.

Others before them behaved as badly and worse. One of Bromwich’s more telling quotations comes from George Orwell remarking on the way in which the British described the process of bombing tribesmen out of their homes:

Defenceless villages are bombarded from the air, the inhabitants driven out into the countryside, the cattle machine-gunned, the huts set on fire with incendiary bullets: this is called *pacification*.

Orwell was evenhanded; in the same passage of “Politics and the English Language” Stalinist euphemisms were dealt with just as savagely:

People are imprisoned for years without trial, or shot in the back of the neck or sent to die of scurvy in Arctic lumber camps: this is called *elimination of unreliable elements*. Such phraseology is needed if one wants to name things without calling up mental pictures of them.

“Enhanced interrogation techniques” is only a recent addition to a very long list.

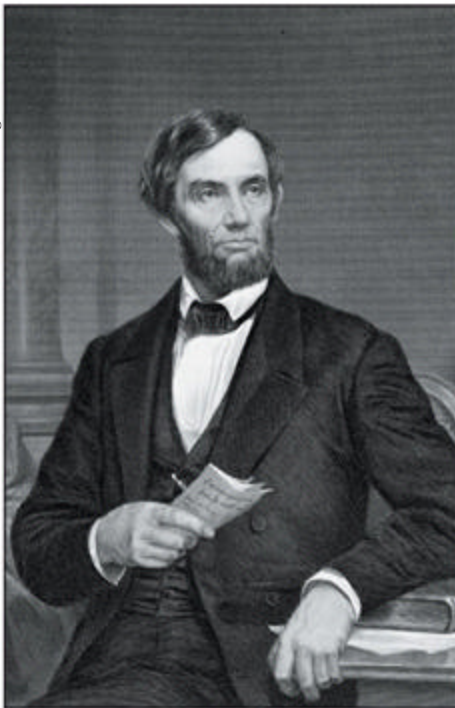
2.

The first two essays set out what Bromwich sees as the polarities of social and political criticism, on the one side a developed moral imagination, on the other an excess of loyalty to and immersion in the culture in which we are brought up. “Moral Imagination” reminds us that a vivid imagination has often been seen as a curse rather than a blessing, as in the wrong conditions it obviously is. Othello’s uncontrolled imagination, after all, makes him an easy victim of Iago’s scheming. A more phlegmatic Othello would have been less gullible.

For Bromwich’s purposes, it is the *moral* imagination that is at stake; and his view of it is that it is the capacity to put ourselves in the shoes of those who are not only not ourselves but very different from us. This is not a matter of personal acquaintance, knowing them in depth, or individually, but being moved by their situation and being able to reflect sensitively and imaginatively on it.

Although *Moral Imagination* is in large part a book about politics, and especially the politics of war, its resources are historical and literary, and Bromwich makes his point about the essence of moral imagination with one of Wordsworth’s *Lyrical Ballads*. “The Idiot Boy” is a strange poem, and caused its first readers a good deal of puzzlement; the boy of the title is sent off on horseback by his mother, Betty Foy, to fetch the doctor for her friend, Susan Gale. He fails to return; Betty

Granger Collection



Abraham Lincoln, 1870; Edward Snowden, 2014

shivering nature, and to raise it to a dignity in our own estimation, are to be exploded as a ridiculous, absurd, and antiquated fashion.

Although Bromwich begins with this famous claim from Burke, he immediately goes on to engage with very different writers, Shelley and Whitman and Dickinson among them. Burke wanted to remind his readers of the inherited moral resources of their own society. Bromwich is equally anxious to remind them to employ their own imaginative resources when those of their society fail.

Bromwich has engaged with the subject of moral imagination for many years. As far back as 1983, his first book, on the English radical critic William Hazlitt, opened with a chapter on “Imagination” where, significantly enough, he quotes Hazlitt expressing his admiration for Burke, qualified by his reminder that he knows enough to admire Burke while remaining immune to the noxious fumes of his conservatism. That nicely captures Bromwich’s own position.

Those who read these essays alongside Bromwich’s account of Burke’s intellectual and political career will find their eye caught by three topics, all with Burkean overtones, deeply relevant to the present, and handled with Bromwich’s characteristic sharpness. The first is the focus of the first two essays: how to draw on the moral, political, and intellectual resources of the culture in which we are raised to enlarge our moral imagination rather than to

and imagination a statesman requires to handle critical situations prudently, and without gross violations of morality; and how like and unlike those qualities may be to what we can expect of the ordinary citizen. American democracy is particularly plagued by that question; we want our leaders to be representative figures, but we long for heroes, too. We are committed to the importance of our own individual, perhaps even idiosyncratic, perspective on the world; and we long to be led by a leader who shares it.

The third topic is the temptations that beset an imperial power, and the ways in which the possession of overwhelming military power leads political leaders and ordinary citizens alike to imagine a world in which the “bad guys” are smoked out and evil is destroyed. The likely result of turning this fantasy into military action was spelled out almost two millennia ago by the northern British chieftain Calgacus, rallying his followers to resist the Roman legions. “To robbery, butchery, and rapine,” he said, “they give the lying name of ‘government’; they create a desolation and call it peace.”² Bromwich is particularly sharp on the way government spokesmen wrap the realities of massacre, torture, and gratuitous cruelty in euphemism.

Critics of Bromwich’s hostility to the present administration have been puzzled by the ferocity of his attacks on President Obama, but nothing here

²*Solitudinem faciunt, pacem appellant* are the four most famous words in Tacitus’s *Agricola*.

¹*The Intellectual Life of Edmund Burke: From the Sublime and Beautiful to American Independence* (Belknap Press/Harvard University Press, 2014); see my review in these pages, March 5, 2015.

Foy goes for the doctor herself, but the doctor refuses to come. She searches all night for her son, and finally finds him, seated on his horse; asked what has happened, he responds, “The cocks did crow to-who, to-who, / And the sun did shine so cold!” In the meantime, Susan Gale is miraculously better.

A natural reaction is to wonder what we are to think about a boy who sees owls as cocks crowing at dawn and the moon as a mysteriously cold sun; but Wordsworth wanted his readers to engage not with the boy but with his mother, searching all night, and overjoyed to see him safe and sound and glad to see her. Wordsworth explained that he was “tracing the maternal passion through many of its more subtle windings.” He was not engaging in a politically correct attempt to empathize with the intellectually disadvantaged in the twenty-first-century mode, nor in a depiction of the strange and alien in a more eighteenth-century mode, but in making Betty Foy vivid to us.

The transition to politics is indirect but clear enough. Edmund Burke protesting the cruelties of the East India Company and Martin Luther King turning against the Vietnam War when he saw photographs of children burned by napalm may be almost two centuries apart, but they shared a common reaction to cruelties that provoked a nearly physical revulsion.

Bromwich sets his account of the moral imagination, with which he thinks Lincoln and Whitman were richly endowed, against the communitarian emphasis on culture and rootedness that was so much a feature of political argument in the 1990s, especially during the so-called “culture wars.” The most notable liberal defenders of the importance of culture were Michael Walzer and Charles Taylor, both of whom come in for some rough handling.

Taylor’s advocacy of a “politics of recognition” asks us to conduct social, economic, and political life in a way that reassures everyone that their allegiances, values, and ways of life are taken seriously by the wider society. The demand for recognition almost always arises when an ethnic, linguistic, or religious minority feels that it is being treated with contempt. It is the demand for respect. But there is a narrow line between asking not to be treated with contempt and asking to be positively valued. Atheists will have a hard time “recognizing” Orthodox Jews and vice versa, and speakers of a majority language will be bound to ask awkward questions about who is to pay the bills for printing every form in a dozen different languages. Since toleration is one thing and respect another, the demand for recognition asks for more than toleration; it asks for approval, perhaps even for assistance in keeping such subcultures alive. But why would a liberal state do that? Toleration is quite enough.

Bromwich observes that some people will claim that September 11 cured everyone of a belief in the benign effects of culture, but he says nothing could be further from the truth. The thought that everyone is and should be the creatures of their culture underlies, he claims, some of the largest follies of recent American foreign policy. Thinking that Iraq could be governed as a set of distinct Shia, Sunni, and Kurdish communities was not the prelude to the reign of peace and cooperation but to

the bloody horrors that took place between 2004 and 2007.

If encouraging an obsession with cultural identity—which in a political setting invariably means religious, racial, and ethnic identity—has had some terrible consequences, its intellectual basis is shaky in spite of the best efforts of some distinguished philosophers and political theorists. One of Bromwich’s shrewdest jabs is the observation that it is boringly true that we all come from somewhere, and that all of us in that sense have roots, much as we come from families; but who, he asks, is to say that all families are happy families?

In Bromwich’s view, the facts about our origins are just that; they are about where we came from as a matter of fact. Whether we should feel pleased with the hand that fate dealt us is another matter. To elevate loyalty to whatever culture we are talking about to the highest of virtues is precisely a failure of moral imagination.

Unsurprisingly, Bromwich reprints alongside these two lengthy essays a shorter piece, “The Meaning of Patriotism in 1789.” This picks up the argument between the Reverend Richard Price and Burke. Price’s sermon on love of country was what provoked Burke’s *Reflections on the Revolution in France*. Price thought we should love our country to the extent that it promoted the interests of mankind at large; and we should accept our government as legitimate to the extent that it worked effectively to that end. His insistence that the people retained an inalienable right to appoint their rulers and “cashier them for misconduct” provoked Burke to fury. Price thought that the Glorious Revolution of 1688 that had deposed James II, the American Revolution of 1776, and the French Revolution of 1789 were in all three cases vindications of that inalienable right.

Burke insisted that political authority rested on “prejudice,” the habit of obedience; we accepted our rulers out of habit, unless something dramatic occurred to break that habit. The revolutions of 1688 and 1776 had been defensive, restorative actions to reestablish political arrangements that the English in 1688 and the American colonists in 1776 had seen violated. We do not proportion our allegiance to a rational conviction that our country is the agent of universal values.

The implication is not hard to draw: patriotism is neither “My Country Right or Wrong” nor a license for imperial adventures. A less obvious thought is one that Bromwich credits to Hazlitt. We are not friends and neighbors of our compatriots, who are in the most literal sense strangers to us. Patriotism is not a natural reaction to physical proximity or personal acquaintance; it must be “the creature of reason and reflection,” in which case it had better be intelligently reflective. With the director of the CIA praising the torturers employed by his organization as “patriots,” it seems a good moment to think again about patriotism.

3.

The central essays of Bromwich’s book are more meditative, and none the worse for it. They focus on the American character, encouragingly in the essay “Lincoln and Whitman as Rep-

resentative Americans,” less encouragingly when it is exemplified by the recent craze for self-exposure on reality TV. The centerpiece is a long essay, “Lincoln’s Constitutional Necessity,” that is essentially a eulogy to Lincoln’s temperament as a leader who was neither at the mercy of events—although he frequently described himself in just such terms—nor driven by an impulse to strike heroic or self-aggrandizing poses. Even at the end of the Civil War, it is impossible to imagine Lincoln galloping up on horseback to declare “mission accomplished.”

The theme of “Lincoln’s Constitutional Necessity” is the deftness with which Lincoln acknowledged the realities of the politics of the day without ever shifting from his detestation of slavery. For him, necessity required



David Bromwich, New York City, May 2014

Gusta Johnson/Carnegie Council

that the compromises built into the Constitution be accepted until the institution of slavery had lost such legitimacy as it had had in 1787. Necessity worked both ways; it was necessary to work within the constraints that existing institutions and attitudes imposed, but a larger necessity, the workings of history, would operate to extinguish an institution that was evidently a moral abomination. That history was on the side of abolition seemed obvious from the early years of the Republic; the slave trade had been abolished before the end of the twenty years envisaged in the Constitution, and engaging in the trade had subsequently been treated as a capital offense on a par with piracy.

Yet progress had been halting. The Missouri Compromise of 1820 imagined a balance of free and slave states lasting into the indefinite future. What impresses Bromwich is Lincoln’s ability to preserve an implacable opposition to slavery without demonizing slaveholders or accepting the abolitionists’ view that the Constitution was a “Covenant with Hell.” The Constitution was the basis of a legitimate, democratic government. Perhaps even more important were the opening words of the Declaration of Independence; the United States was built on the principle that all men are created equal. That principle excludes slavery, as Lincoln said in 1854: “The plain unmistakable spirit of that age, toward slavery, was hostility to the PRINCIPLE, and toleration, ONLY BY NECESSITY.”

Lincoln’s moral imagination was capable of stretching to appreciate that slaveowners were not worse men,

person by person, than their northern cousins. “They are just what we would be in their situation,” he said; people get used to the arrangements around them, and there was always a danger of people getting used to slavery, which was one reason why the Kansas-Nebraska Act was a disaster. Making slavery a local option, as the act called for, was reducing a matter of principle—that slavery should be extinguished as and when possible—into a matter of “dollars and cents.” And as he did in the *Dred Scott* case, Lincoln drew the line at any suggestion that free Americans should acknowledge the legitimacy of slavery.

Here is where Bromwich’s opposition to the “politics of recognition” finds its historical roots; it might be necessary to tolerate slavery, but it was impossible to accord it moral recognition. Yet Chief Justice Roger Taney’s decision in *Dred Scott* amounted to just such a demand for recognition: the inhabitants of states where slavery had been abolished were to be required to reenslave their fellow inhabitants.

4.

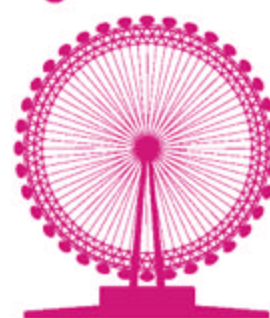
It is, of course, unfair to hold present-day politicians to the standards set by Lincoln in a time of genuine national crisis. The Civil War was a war to decide whether the United States would remain one country or two, of which one would be a state whose *raison d’être* was the preservation of chattel slavery. Neither the two world wars of the twentieth century nor the cold war that ensued posed such a problem. Bromwich does not suggest that we measure the authors of the so-called war on terror by such exalted standards, although one cannot help feeling that the combination of complete moral clarity with enormous self-restraint displayed by Lincoln would stand a national leader in good stead in times of peace as well as war.

What moves Bromwich—apart from deep disgust—is the thought that after the end of the Soviet Union in 1989, the United States simply squandered the chance to repair the damage done by forty-five years of overinvestment in military hardware and neglect of the country’s social and physical infrastructure. Instead of which, hubris became the dominant style; the fact that no other power could hope to challenge the United States militarily was mistaken for a license, even a duty, to remodel the world in an American image. One begins to see why Bromwich is so sharp with President Obama when reading his tart discussion of Reinhold Niebuhr’s reflections on our proneness to political self-deception in *The Irony of American History* and elsewhere; Obama claimed to be a disciple of Niebuhr, but has behaved with a moral obtuseness that makes the claim a bad joke.

Why is Niebuhr an obvious figure to invoke? It is not because he was right about the politics of the early cold war; like many anxious liberals, he wanted the United States to stand up to the Soviet Union, but not in a fashion that might provoke a war. He wanted the United States to intervene to prevent Communist takeovers, but the US interventions of the day—Bromwich cites the overthrow of Mohammad Mosaddegh in Iran and Jacobo Árbenz in Guatemala—were just what he did not



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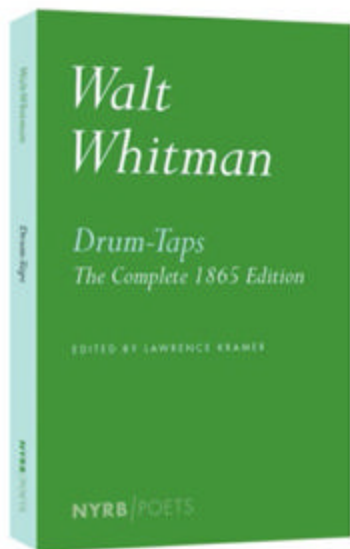


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DRUM-TAPS THE COMPLETE 1865 EDITION Walt Whitman

Edited by Lawrence Kramer
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—Walt Whitman, letter to William D. O'Connor, January 6, 1865

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want. Niebuhr's ambivalence about the nuclear bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki has not worn well either.

But Niebuhr reminded his readers of two things it is easy to forget. Liberal societies are better than totalitarian societies, but liberals are no less afflicted with the taint of Original Sin than the rest of humanity. And if individual liberals are prone to forget it, it is much harder to persuade an entire nation to acknowledge itself as guilty of wickedness. "Patriotism transmutes individual unselfishness into national egoism," Niebuhr wrote. When citizens give themselves wholeheartedly to the service of the nation,

The unqualified character of this devotion is the very basis of the nation's power and of the freedom to use the power without moral restraint. Thus the unselfishness of individuals makes for the selfishness of nations.

The moral is not entirely obvious. It is not isolationist. But it is deeply hostile to moral crusades. This is not, says Bromwich, only a matter of appreciating the limits of our ability to rid the world of evil; it is more importantly a matter of acknowledging the evil in ourselves:

Niebuhr said that there is evil in the world; also, that there is evil in ourselves. Only if you take the second point with the first will you discern the depth of the madness in the claim by President George W. Bush, on September 14, 2001, that Americans are now in a position to "rid the world of evil."

The same reticence about ascribing every evil act to the wickedness of our enemies must, of course, be applied at home. We do not have to imagine every CIA operative a sadist; only to appreciate that conscientious people do terrible things when they pursue what they believe is the national interest, unconstrained by the knowledge that the damage the enemy can do to us is nothing to

the damage we can do to ourselves.

The final chapter, "Comments on Perpetual War," displays Bromwich's skills as a critic in the tradition of Hazlitt and Orwell. Nailing the Bush administration's habit of disguising the realities of torture and massacre in whatever bureaucratic euphemism came to hand is not unduly difficult; but Bromwich's sustained pursuit—for instance of Condoleezza Rice's description of the Lebanon War of 2006 as "the birth pangs of a new Middle East"—takes stamina as well as a sharp eye and a sharp pen. But since hardly anyone now thinks that the "war on terror" has been anything other than a disappointment to its defenders and a disaster in the eyes of its critics, it is perhaps right to end, as *Moral Imagination* does, with Bromwich celebrating Edward Snowden's courage in revealing what he had learned about the government's surveillance of its citizens.

Critics of Snowden's actions range from those who think it is simple treason to divulge official secrets to those who think he was right to want to bring the extent of the government's program of spying on its own and everyone else's citizens into the open, but that he should have somehow taken a more responsible route, perhaps waiting several months for *The New York Times* to verify the authenticity of the material. Bromwich seems to me to get it right. Reactions to Snowden's disclosures cut across party lines; Democrats and Republicans came out on both sides, and the split provided "an infallible marker of the anti-authoritarian instinct against the authoritarian."

What especially distresses Bromwich is "the evidence of the way the last few years have worn deep channels of authoritarian acceptance in the mind of the liberal establishment." Anyone who wonders why he is quite so critical of President Obama might reflect on that thought, along with the fact that this administration has employed the Espionage Act of 1917 to prosecute more whistle-blowers than all previous administrations put together. □

PILLOW

How solitary
and resolute you look in the morning.
A stoic in your cotton sleeve.
Do you dream of walking out

rain or shine
a truffle balanced on your sternum
and overtaking me on the sidewalk?
Or is that a smile

because you interpret nothing
and statelessness is where you live?
How calmly you indulge my moods.

See you tonight, by the sovereign chartreuse
ceramics at the Met.
Let's hear what you'd do differently.

—Jana Prikryl

Shakespeare and the Struggle for Power

Stanley Wells

**Making Make-Believe Real:
Politics as Theater
in Shakespeare's Time**
by Garry Wills.

Yale University Press, 414 pp., \$30.00

The twin stars of Garry Wills's immensely well-informed and wide-ranging book are Queen Elizabeth I and William Shakespeare, but it also boasts a glittering supporting cast of courtiers, poets, statesmen, and playwrights other than Shakespeare. The theatrical metaphor is inevitable because of the resemblances in the Elizabethan Age between the theater and the great stage of the world, where politics, drama, and the other arts interacted and reflected one another.

Wills writes that the aim of his book is "to look at the various kinds of imaginative construction that went into [Elizabeth's] reign—at its make-believe love, make-believe monarchy, make-believe religion, make-believe locales, and make-believe war." Drama is at the book's center because the plays of the time are full of self-dramatizing characters "who put themselves on a stage to delight in their own performance." Shakespeare's Richard III, Richard II, and Antony and Cleopatra, Marlowe's Edward II and Tamburlaine, are just a few of the most obvious examples. And among these the "most grandiose self-presenters are men and women who seek or hold power."

In real life, too, persons in positions of high power needed to use dramatic means to project their personalities, to exercise control, and even to sustain their personal identity. Elizabeth's subjects put pressure on her, not least in the matter of marriage, but "the pressures on her changed over the years from urging her *toward* marriage to guarding her *from* marriage." She negotiated her course in this as in many other difficult matters with consummate skill. As a result, during her long reign she won the admiration, even adulation, of a great number of extraordinary and diverse followers, many of whom figure in this book's cast.

Of course, courtiers tend by nature to be sycophantic, and many expressions of praise for a monarch are insincere and self-serving. But Elizabeth was intelligent enough to preserve her integrity. She knew her own worth, writing in her private prayers:

I am unimpaired in body, with a good form, a healthy and substantial wit, prudence even beyond other women, and beyond this, distinguished and superior in the knowledge and use of literature and languages, which is highly esteemed because unusual in my sex.

Especially toward the end of her reign she received adulatory tributes from poets such as Edmund Spenser, dramatists such as George Peele, musicians such as Thomas Morley, and a great bevy of lesser courtiers. But she had strength of character enough to distinguish between true and false praise.

Like a great actor, she was a mistress of the art of self-projection, aware of her theatricality. Wills quotes her own words: "Princes, you know, stand upon stages so that their actions are viewed and beheld of all men." Throughout her

then breaks it off unfinished and tells Seyton to carry it after him." When Cleopatra takes over the task of arming Antony from his servant Eros, he needs to "keep correcting her efforts as he teases her about it." And in *The Two Noble Kinsmen* Arcite and Palamon "spend almost fifty lines arming each other." The make-believe of the theater mirrored the reality of the battlefield.

Among the ways that the Queen's courtiers

entertained her was the mounting of extraordinarily elaborate and expensive tilts and tournaments. Sir Philip Sidney, a major supporting character of Wills's book, was a superb horseman and accomplished tilter, "able to supply his own mini-cavalry of gorgeous horses in the entertainment he and his friends mounted for Elizabeth, *The Four Foster Children of Desire*." There is fruitful interaction between life and literature in the use that Sidney makes of his experiences at the Accession Day tilt of 1575, when he was twenty-three years old, in the "Iberian Romance" of his revision of *Arcadia*.

Somewhat similarly, Wills writes that Spenser's *Faerie Queene* "was planned as a great continuation and exaltation of the Accession Day tournaments that annually celebrated Elizabeth." Though Shakespeare did not write entertainments intended exclusively for the royal court, an interrupted tilt features in *Richard II*. The tournament for the Princess's

birthday forms one of the great set pieces in *Pericles*, in which each competitor bears on his shield a device with a cryptic inscription. And among Shakespeare's final literary tasks, a decade after Elizabeth's death, was the composition of the motto, now lost, for the *impresa* carried at the Earl of Rutland's tilt in 1613 and painted by the dramatist's actor friend Richard Burbage.

On Elizabeth's frequent progresses around the country throughout her reign, during which she expected to be elaborately and expensively entertained by her hosts, she was routinely offered a wide range of entertainments such as Sidney's pageant *The Lady of May*, described by Jean Wilson as "a charming combination of comedy, sylvan pastoral debate, and compliments to the Queen," in which she herself was required to take part by deciding which of two suitors the Lady of May should marry.

These progresses, enjoyable though she may have found them, were not simply self-indulgent ways of gaining hospitality at her subjects' expense. During their course she was "eliciting and confirming loyalties, soothing discontents, or promoting her religious,

political, and military ideals." A recurring theme of Wills's book is her need to steer her country through the transition from Roman Catholicism to forms of Protestantism that would be acceptable to at least a high proportion of her subjects as well as to herself, while also safeguarding the nation's position on the world's stage.

To this end she was willing even to visit conforming Roman Catholic family manors, "assuring them she would not be punitive if they did not harbor seditious priests." But she could be steely: "When she visited Edward Rokewood at Euston, and a forbidden statue of the Virgin Mary was found on the estate, she had it publicly burned and turned him over to the local court."

Elizabeth's skills of self-presentation included the ability, at least metaphorically, to don the garb of humility as Shakespeare's Coriolanus is so reluctant to do. She was willing to "touch" humble people to cure the disease called the King's Evil during her progresses, and at the annual Maundy Thursday service "she washed each foot of the poor women brought to her, made the sign of the cross on each foot, and then kissed it." At the very start of her reign, she was officially welcomed into the capital with a great ceremonial procession shortly before her coronation:

Tapestries and emblems blazoned the way, and at ten sites the queen was addressed, sung to, or entertained. Carried in a horse-drawn open litter, she directed that her vehicle be brought close or backed up to hear and see the performances more carefully, to respond to or comment on them.

Presented on her arrival by a boy-angel with a copy of the English Bible, lowered on a silken thread as if it came straight from heaven, she "kissed it [i.e., the Bible], lifted it on high, then clasped it to her breast."

Two years later, when her cousin Mary Stuart somewhat similarly entered Edinburgh to reclaim the Scottish throne, she too was presented with an English Bible, but, lacking Elizabeth's sense of how to please an audience, instantly handed it over to her Catholic captain of the guard "and rode briskly on." Elizabeth's action became legendary and was frequently reenacted on the stage.

Inevitably there were times when she felt seriously insecure, above all as, toward the end of her reign, the question of who would succeed her on the throne became an ever-present anxiety both to her and to her subjects. A play of central interest here is Shakespeare's *Richard II*. As is well known, when it first appeared in print in 1597, probably a couple of years after it was first performed, and in the two reprints of 1598—which demonstrate exceptional public interest in the text—it lacked the scene depicting the King's deposition, which however does appear in the edition of 1604, the first to be printed after Elizabeth's death, as well as in the First Folio of 1623.

It is also well known that supporters of the Earl of Essex—another



John Gielgud in Shakespeare's *Richard II*, 1938

Gordon Anthony/Hulton-Deutsch Collection/Corbis

reign she presented herself to her people with the flair and manipulative self-knowledge of a virtuoso performer. She could rise to great occasions with a dignity and grandeur worthy of a tragedy queen. Addressing her troops assembled at Tilbury in 1588 to repel the invasion by the Spanish Armada when, William Camden wrote, "incredible it is how much she encouraged the hearts of her captains and soldiers by her presence and speech to them," "she is reported to have worn a silver cuirass, with an attendant riding beside her with a silver helmet."

In doing so she emulated the soldier heroes and even heroines—such as Shakespeare's Joan la Pucelle, who fights "with the sword of Deborah," and Margaret of Anjou, "she-wolf of France"—of the stage: acting companies had stocks of armor for their dramatic warriors. Wills has a fascinating and informative section on scenes in Shakespeare in which characters are required to don armor: "The cumbrous task of assembling it around the body is indicated by the number of lines spoken while the actors do it. Macbeth... spends twenty-five lines on the process,

prominent member of this book's supporting cast—commissioned the Lord Chamberlain's Men to put on at short notice a special performance of the play on February 7, 1601, the day before the Earl led an uprising designed to restore him to the Queen's favor and, as the play's most recent editors write, "to pave the way for James VI of Scotland to become Elizabeth's official heir."¹

It is also recorded that in August 1601, six months after Essex had been executed, William Lambard, an antiquary and archivist to the Queen, presented her with a manuscript in which the name of Richard II occurred, prompting her to say, "I am Richard II, know ye not that?" And when Lambard, probably quaking in his boots, admitted that "such a wicked imagination was determined and attempted by a most unkind gentleman [i.e., Essex], the most adorned creature that ever your majesty made," Elizabeth responded with: "He that will forget God will also forget his benefactor; this tragedy was played forty times in open streets and houses."

Wills devotes much attention—some of it impassioned to the point of being bad-tempered—to the attempt to dispel what he calls the "myth" both that the performance commissioned by Essex was an act of subversion (this is part of his campaign against New Historicism, especially as represented by Stephen Greenblatt, whom he refers to as the critical movement's "John the Baptist") and that Elizabeth had Shakespeare's play in mind when she spoke of Richard II. In the course of his discussion he examines at length the document that purports to be Lambard's own account of his interview with the Queen, in which she makes the supposed allusion to *Richard II*.

Wills is right to question what was said about the place of performance but not about its frequency. "No play by Shakespeare," he writes, "can have been put on forty times in Elizabeth's lifetime or even in his." This is surely wrong: in the ad hoc theatrical system of the time plays could come and go with minimal preparation according to demand, as the theater records of Philip Henslowe amply demonstrate and as the Essex-inspired performance of *Richard II* itself shows.

Wills's polemic is inspired by the desire to refute the idea that *Richard II* was put on as a subversive act, but he cannot deny, and does not try to deny, that the performance was commissioned by Essex's followers the day before the uprising, or that the members of the company who performed it were hauled into court to give an account of themselves for doing so. It would surely be absurd to suggest that the insurrectionists simply wanted a good afternoon's entertainment and just happened to alight on this play for the purpose. They would have done much better with *A Midsummer Night's Dream*—or even with *The Merry Wives of Windsor*.

For all Wills's interest in real-life theatricality, his approach to Shakespeare is essentially that of a reader rather than a playgoer. When he offers comment on performance it is based, so

far as he tells us, on films or on other scholars' accounts rather than on personal theatrical experience. This can result in clear misjudgments. Writing on *The Taming of the Shrew*, a play that allows him to vent his spleen against feminist critics, he comments that "Ann Thompson notes that Petruchio shares Kate's deprivations of sleep and food" and that Petruccio "denies Kate meat because it is not good enough for her but denies himself because it makes him choleric: 'And I expressly am forbid to touch it/For it engenders choler, planteth anger.'" And he criticizes John Cleese in the television version directed by Jonathan Miller (not, as he writes, by Peter Hall) on the grounds that he "slips when he later chews on a morsel of meat."

Surely this obtusely fails to recognize the slyness of Petruccio's tactics of pretence. Wills overgeneralizes in commenting that this play "is now staged as a form of martial combat." And he fails to note that inclusion of the Christopher Sly framework, in which the main plot becomes a form of dream fulfillment, can radically affect interpretation of the main action. His remark that at the end of *Measure for Measure* Isabella "accepts so easily" the Duke's offer of marriage shows a lack of awareness of the play's recent stage history. Ever since John Barton's RSC production of 1970, in which Isabella, with no violation of the text, did not accept the Duke, this has been a theatrical crux, discussed in an essay that Wills cites in his notes but ignores in his text.

Wills's prose style is fluent, readable, friendly toward his readers (so long as he thinks they will agree with him), sometimes colloquial, at times even slangy: "Harold Goddard argues that Shakespeare was setting the audience up for a sucker punch," an expression familiar in America (but not England) as "punch delivered without warning." It is also, when he discusses the views of critics with whose opinions he disagrees, ironic, sarcastic, and at times downright insulting. His prose becomes particularly colorful in discussions of two characters from the history plays, Prince Hal, later King Henry V, and Sir John Falstaff. Arguing that in portraying Henry V Shakespeare tried "to create a wise and good king," and that "audiences in the past used to believe the play's Chorus when he called Henry V 'this star of England,'" he writes with heavy-handed irony,

now we know better. We see Henry V for what he really is—a cruel and lying war criminal, believing none, deceiving all, cut off from decent human feeling. The king may have fooled his own play's Chorus, but he can't get away with it at the Modern Language Association, where convened scholars have spent years peeling away this king's lies to reveal the cold deceiver under them.

And before long, mounted upon one of his feistiest hobby horses, he is tilting his lance against the New Historicists, "the Hal Haters," as he calls them. Arguing against those who—like Andrew Gurr in his New Cambridge edition—take an ironic view of the Chorus's praise of the king, Wills again resorts to sarcasm:

Why on earth would a playwright do that—tell an audience to heed him now, in order to avoid heeding what he presents later? And then keep bringing Chorus back, at intervals, to say the opposite of what the play is showing you?

All this, he writes, "goes against common sense, theatrical tradition, and Shakespeare's own practice." Wills makes excellent points in his defense of Hal but his vehemence is likely to alienate rather than persuade both those whose views he attacks and those who have been persuaded by them.

Having inveighed against moralistic criticism of Henry V, Wills himself proceeds (and also, to adopt one of his own criteria, against theatrical tradition) to advocate an intensely moralistic atti-

Garry Wills



tude toward Hal's companion Falstaff. Here his chief whipping boy is Harold Bloom who, he writes, "assures us that Falstaff, unlike Hal, 'betrays and harms no one.'" Now we are off:

Harms no one? Ask the widows and relatives of the poor stragglers he sends into war, on two occasions, in order to line his own pocket. Assigned to collect troops, the only civic duty asked of him as a knight, Falstaff turns war profiteer both times. He takes bribes, in preparation for battles at Shrewsbury and Gaultree...to let able-bodied men escape service. Then he fills out his ranks with the feeble and the defenseless, what he himself calls "food for powder, food for powder; they'll fill a pit as well as better."

He mocks Bloom for having fallen

in love with Falstaff at the age of sixteen when he saw Ralph Richardson play him onstage. He has had a schoolboy crush on Falstaff ever since. His awed gaze at the great man is something we know from other boyish hero worshipers. Falstaff is Alan Breck to Bloom's David Balfour, or Long John to his Jim Hawkins, or Steerforth to his David Copperfield. Boys at a certain age are suckers for cocksure swaggerers. But those boys saw in time the flaws in their heroes. They grew up. Bloom never did.

Wills's disapprobation of many aspects of Falstaff's character and behavior and of some critics' attitudes toward him is rationally justified but critically unbalanced, lacking a sense of theatrical perspective. It makes no allowance

for the affection that Falstaff inspires even in his victims, such as Mistress Quickly and Doll Tearsheet, for Hal's recurrent though not infinite tolerance of his faults, and for the poignancy of Quickly's account of his death. Shakespeare's capacity for forgiveness, his willingness to show compassion even for that other notable misleader of youth, Paroles in *All's Well That Ends Well*—"There's place and means for every man alive"—was greater than Wills gives him credit for.

Interaction between theater and state affairs continued, of course, after Elizabeth's death into the reign of her successor, James I, and here the most significantly dramatic event was the Jesuit-inspired Gunpowder Plot of 1605. "The denunciations of the Gunpowder Plot," writes Wills, reworking material from his earlier book, *Witches and Jesuits: Shakespeare's Macbeth*,² "focused heavily on Jesuits, since their superior in England, Henry Garnet, was not simply captured and executed for the plot, but a book he wrote—*A Treatise of Equivocation* (1598)—was found in searches for the plotters." In Shakespeare's *Macbeth* the witches bring about the hero's downfall through their equivocal prophecies. "It is not surprising," writes Wills, "that *Macbeth*, first performed in the year following the plot, has equivocation as a theme." *Macbeth's* account of the witches—

And be these juggling fiends no
more believ'd,
That palter with us in a double
sense,
That keep the word of promise to
our ear,
And break it to our hope

—is indeed "an exact description of Jesuitical equivocation." And when, after Duncan's murder, the Porter comes on having heard a "knocking at the south entry," he appears to welcome into his imagined Hell three people: "a farmer, that hanged himself on the expectation of plenty," "an equivocator that could swear in both the scales against either scale, who committed treason enough for God's sake, yet could not equivocate to heaven," and "an English tailor come hither for stealing out of a French hose."

It has been generally agreed that the "equivocator" alludes to Father Henry Garnet, who justified his use of equivocation under interrogation at his trial for treason; he had been hanged, drawn, and quartered on May 3 (not 6), 1606. "There has," writes Wills, "been wide disagreement on the identity of the other sinners hailed by the Porter," but he argues with interesting though not conclusive evidence that "there are not two other sinners" but that the Porter greets Garnet "in his various shapes as the witches had greeted Macbeth under three different titles: Glamis, Cawdor, and King."

Some support for this may be provided by the fact that at his trial "it was testified that one of the false names Garnet had used during his days in disguise was 'Farmer,'" and Wills provides interesting evidence from a contemporary poem about Garnet's death to support his theory that the Porter's "farmer" also alludes to Garnet. It is so far as I know an original suggestion that can neither be proved nor disproved. □

²Oxford University Press, 1995.

¹*Richard II*, edited by Anthony B. Dawson and Paul Yachnin (Oxford University Press, 2011), p. 3.

France: Hatred à la Mode

Mark Lilla

Le Suicide français
by Éric Zemmour.
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1.

For three days the sirens never stopped in Paris. They began on the morning of January 7 right after two French Muslim terrorists infiltrated the offices of *Charlie Hebdo* in the Marais and killed twelve people. A police dragnet spread out as the killers veered through the city before they escaped in the direction of Rennes. The next morning a young policewoman was shot dead on a street near a Jewish school just outside the freeway ringing the city and again the police spread out. On January 9 television stations reported that another terrorist had taken hostages at a kosher grocery store near the Porte de Vincennes, and through the window of my office, which gives onto the Seine, I heard a steady stream of police and military vehicles rushing to the scene throughout the day. And then ambulances, which meant the news was not good.

Yet somehow it did not feel as if lightning had struck. Of course no one had predicted the spectacular assaults that took place. But throughout 2014 a series of disturbing events had in a sense primed the French public for them. Within days of the killings one began to witness a retrospective narrative developing, which suggested that “all the signs were there” but “they”—the government, the police, journalists—refused to recognize them. Untrue, but it is not a hard story to sell.

It all began in May when Mehdi Nemmouche—a Franco-Algerian petty criminal who had converted to radical Islamism in prison and then gone to Syria to join jihadist groups fighting there—walked into the Jewish Museum of Belgium in Brussels and calmly murdered four people with an assault rifle and revolver. He had been inspired by Mohamed Merah, the terrorist who in March 2012 assassinated three Muslim French soldiers in Toulouse and Montauban, thirty miles away, then massacred a teacher and three students in a Jewish school in Toulouse. Merah’s last victim was a little girl, whom he turned toward the surveillance camera before shooting her in the head. The public’s response focused less on the victims than on the fact that Merah—who was killed by police while hiding out in an apartment in Toulouse—was then celebrated as a hero on social media by French Muslim sympathizers.

The battlefield successes of ISIS last summer brought more reasons to worry, as news reports circulated about devastated French families whose children, boys and girls, many recent converts, were leaving France to join jihadist forces. Four young men from one French country village, for example, were killed in Syria in a single week in October. The most dramatic case was that of Maxime Hauchard, a twenty-two-year-old convert from a small Norman village, who, along with another French convert, was spotted in

an ISIS video in November participating in the slaughter of eighteen Syrian soldiers and an American aid worker. A few weeks before, an experienced French mountain travel guide was captured by jihadists in Algeria’s Djurdjura Mountains while going to visit friends. He was shown in a video kneeling and wearing a blue T-shirt, and then we see his severed head. He was the sixth such French victim over the past five years.

Just before Christmas the French public was again put on edge. One Satur-



Éric Zemmour arriving at court for his trial on charges of inciting racial hatred, Paris, January 2011

day a Muslim convert whose Facebook page was full of radical Islamist material walked into a police station outside of Tours crying “*allahu akbar*,” pulled out a long knife, and stabbed three policemen, nearly killing one, whom he may have been trying to behead. He was shot and killed. The next day a Muslim man with severe psychological problems and screaming the same thing drove into a Christmas market in Dijon, killing one person and wounding a dozen more before trying, unsuccessfully, to commit suicide. The following day another mentally unstable man babbling something about the children of Chechnya did the same thing in Nantes, killing a shopper at the market and injuring many more. The holidays were quiet, but one week into the new year the three French-born Muslim terrorists struck in Paris.

This cascade of events is largely why the killings provoked more horror than surprise in France: they “fit” into something already there. An additional reason is that for the three previous months a highly polemical debate had been taking place about a right-wing book that offered a grandiose, incendiary, apocalyptic vision of the decline of France in which French Muslims play a central part. Though it was only published in October, Éric Zemmour’s *Le Suicide français* was the second-best-selling book in France last year, and the most argued over. It is one of those political tracts that seems to be printed on litmus paper, its mean-

ing and force changing depending on whose hands are flipping the pages. Already the terms *zemmouriste*, *zemmourien*, and even *zemmourisation* have entered the political lexicon.

Never was a book better timed. For those who had already adopted Zemmour’s vision as their own, everything we have since learned about the Paris assassins—their petty crimes and drug dealing, their troublemaking in schools, the failure of teachers and social workers to help them, their contempt for the law, their embrace of fundamentalism and devotion to jihadism, their heart-

less filming of their murders and delight in committing them—serves to confirm that the country is mortally ill and its institutions in decay. For those who resist his vision, or what they imagine it to be without having read *Le Suicide français*, the book can only serve the explicitly xenophobic National Front and its president Marine Le Pen, who polls suggest would come in first if a presidential election were held today. A prophet, or He Who Shall Not Be Named? In either case, one cannot understand the French reaction to the present crisis without understanding the phenomenon of Éric Zemmour.

2.

Zemmour is less a journalist or thinker than a medium through whom the political passions of the moment pass and take on form. The son of North African Jews, he began his career writing editorials for *Le Figaro*, then started appearing on television and radio where he would give intelligent and unpredictable commentary on the issues of the day. Though clearly on the right, he seemed like a fresh, affable voice, an *épateur* of the Voltairean sort in a new, McLuhan-cool style.

That Zemmour is no more. Today he is an omnipresent Jeremiah who telegraphs the same message, day in and day out, on all available media: *France awake! You have been betrayed and your country has been stolen from you.*

But his populism is nothing like that of the Poujadist movement of the 1950s or of Jean-Marie Le Pen today. He is a genuine intellectual—or what you might call a counterintellectual of the sort the French right produced in the interwar years and who sees others in his guild as the country’s prime traitors. He is well educated, literary, stylish, light on his feet, a happy warrior who never raises his voice even when delivering bad news. And in *Le Suicide français* there is a lot of it.

It is a steamroller of a book. There are seventy-nine short chapters, each devoted to a date supposedly marking France’s decline. (Chapter title: “See Lisbon and Die.”) Zemmour does not transform them into a continuous narrative or even try to explain how they are connected. The connections are meant to be felt; he is a master of affect. Revisiting so many Stations of the French Cross sounds unbearable, but it is a testament to his skill as a writer and slyness as a polemicist that the book works.

The list of catastrophes and especially betrayals is long: birth control, abandonment of the gold standard, speech codes, the Common Market, no-fault divorce, poststructuralism, denationalizing important industries, abortion, the euro, Muslim and Jewish communitarianism, gender studies, surrendering to American power in NATO, surrendering to German power in the EU, surrendering to Muslim power in the schools, banning smoking in restaurants, abolishing conscription, aggressive antiracism, laws defending illegal immigrants, and the introduction of halal food in schools. The list of traitors is shorter but just as various: feminists, left-wing journalists and professors, neoliberal businessmen, antineoliberal activists, cowardly politicians, the educational establishment, European bureaucrats, and even coaches of professional soccer teams who have lost control of their players.

Some of the chapters are, as the French say, *hallucinants*—unhinged. Those devoted to Vichy have attracted the most criticism. Zemmour is angry with Jacques Chirac for making his famous speech in 1995 apologizing for France’s complicity in the murder of its Jewish citizens during the Occupation—a cowardly act, Zemmour snaps, that turned “the Shoah into the official religion of the French Republic.”

In a similar vein he attacks Robert Paxton, the American historian of Vichy and the Jews, who he claims singlehandedly turned the French against their history by dismantling the narrative of French innocence and resistance that De Gaulle constructed after the war to restore the country’s pride. One can argue about the uses and misuses of De Gaulle’s account, but Zemmour goes further, insisting that Vichy actually tried hard to save French Jews, which it did by coolly sacrificing foreign ones—a claim that numerous historians were quick to refute. It is so untenable that even Florian Fillipot, the modernizing vice-president of the National Front, dismissed Zemmour, declaring on television that “there is nothing, absolutely nothing from

Vichy experience to defend. Vichy was not France, France was in London. It was the Resistance that saved the Jews.”

Chapters like these make Zemmour sound like a mere crank. But in the others he scores enough genuine points that a sympathetically inclined reader will soon be prepared to follow him into more dubious territory. He is not the sort of demagogue who nails his theses to the door and declares, “Here I stand, I can do no other.” Zemmour is more fluid, his positions and arguments constantly being refreshed, like a webpage, with new facts and fantasies. This creates a trap for his critics, who have obligingly jumped in. Not content to expose his exaggerations and fabrications, their instinct—a deep one on the French left since the days of the Popular Front—is to denounce anything someone on the right says, so as not to give comfort to the enemy. Their thinking is: if it is four o’clock, and Éric Zemmour says it is four o’clock, it is our duty to say it is three o’clock. Which guarantees that twice a day he will be able to look at his sympathizers and say, “You see what I mean?”

Zemmour’s views are simply too eclectic to be labeled and dismissed *tout court*. And they can be surprising. Like everyone on the French right, he is a self-declared patriot nostalgic for national grandeur, and his prose turns purple whenever he quotes from De Gaulle’s speeches or recounts the triumphs of Napoleon. But high on his list of national traitors is the French business class. He scolds CEOs who have outsourced jobs or planted box stores in exurban areas, effectively killing commerce in small towns and villages, whose streets have emptied, leaving only juvenile delinquents. He charges bankers and financiers with betraying workers and the nation by pushing for full European integration and abandoning the French franc.

He makes much of the fact that, as others have noted, the images on the euro currency lack any historical or geographical references. One sees only bridges that connect nowhere with nowhere, and architectural elements that float in vacant space—apt metaphors for what has happened to the European nation-state. The Revolution, which freed France to determine its own collective destiny, has finally been reversed by Brussels. “The aristocratic Europe of the past and the technocratic oligarchy of today have finally gotten their revenge on the incorrigible French.”

Arguments like these can be found in the countless left-wing antiglobalization pamphlets that fill the tables of French bookstores today. But Zemmour tosses them into a mix with more familiar right-wing arguments, like his attacks on the Sixties generation for promoting radical feminism and defending large-scale immigration. He insinuates that all these things are connected. A decade ago he published a broadside titled *Le premier sexe* about how feminism confused gender roles and emasculated men. In *Le Suicide français* he attacks feminism for how it affects women, arguing that it just liberated men from marriage and responsibility, leaving large numbers of women as divorced single mothers who age and die alone—stock arguments

on the American right, but also among some post-Sixties feminists.

But Zemmour is driving in a very different, nativist direction. Every since their loss in the Franco-Prussian War, which was ascribed to cultural and physical weakness, the French have been obsessed with their birthrate. Today it is relatively high by European standards, but appears—the government refuses to collect statistics on ethnicity—to be sustained by higher rates among families of North and Central Arab African immigrant “stock.” This has become a major obsession on the radical right, whose literature is full of predictions of an imminent *grand remplacement* that will silently turn France into a Muslim country through demographic inertia.

Zemmour never mentions this theory, he simply drops a quote from a

was replaced by the picture of a racist nation that after repressing its colonial subjects abroad consigned them to an underclass at home. By now, so the argument against the left goes, this antiracism is the central dogma of mainstream politics, and has stifled the will to integrate Muslims from immigrant backgrounds into French society, with disastrous results—first and foremost for Muslim youth. Worse, it has stifled open discussion by stigmatizing as racist anyone who raises questions about these developments.*

Finkelkraut has made this strong case but in a tragic register recently in *L’identité malheureuse*. Zemmour adopts a prosecutorial tone, and one thing becomes very clear the deeper one gets into his book: he does not give a damn about his Muslim fellow citizens. He has contempt for them—and

that the rot is too deep, the traitors too numerous, for a patchwork of measures to have any effect. To follow his suicide metaphor, it would be like devising an exercise regimen for a patient on life support. On the book’s last page we read that “France is dying, France is dead.” There is no final chapter on what is to be done to revive it. He leaves that to his reader’s imagination.

Successful ideologies follow a certain trajectory. They are first developed in narrow sects whose adherents share obsessions and principles, and see themselves as voices in the wilderness. To have any political effect, these groups must learn to work with other sects. That’s difficult for obsessive, principled people, which is why at the political fringes one always finds little factions squabbling futilely with each other. But for an ideology to really reshape politics it must cease being a set of principles and become a vaguer but persuasive outlook that new information and events only strengthen. You really know when an ideology has a grip on someone when he takes both A and not-A to be confirmations of it. American conservatism followed something like this trajectory over the past fifty years, as distinctions between the old right and neoconservative intellectuals disappeared and a common, flexible *doxa* developed that could serve unreflective politicians and media demagogues alike.

The French right may be advancing on that trajectory today. Those on the right include pro-European businessmen, anti-European and anti-American Gaullists, traditionalist Catholics opposed to abortion and gay marriage, poor working-class whites who live uneasily next to poor Muslims, and, at the extreme fringe, nativists who want to expel those Muslims. On particular policies, their views are by and large incompatible.

But Éric Zemmour has made a large gift to the factions of the right with *Le Suicide français*. He has given them a common set of enemies; he has given them a calendar of the enemies’ crimes; he has made them feel that there must be some connection between those crimes; and he has stirred them to an outraged hopelessness—which in politics is much more powerful than hope, as the current American president has learned. If the different parts of the French right still have trouble working together, they have just received a vision of France that they can all subscribe to. This at a time when the country is trying to wrap its collective mind around one of the great tragedies and challenges in its recent history.

After the collapse of the Maginot Line in 1940 and the quick end to the *drôle de guerre*, the great question in France was how to explain what Marc Bloch called “a strange defeat.” A similar exercise in retrospective prophecy has now begun and French journalism is focused on little else. What is extraordinary about Éric Zemmour’s book is that it was published before the terrorist attacks, but can now be—and is being—read as the chronicle of seventeen deaths foretold. Yes, the publication of *Le Suicide français* was well timed, at least for its author. For France, not so much.

—Paris, February 19, 2015;
this is the second of three articles.



A demonstrator with an issue of Charlie Hebdo at the march against terrorism, Paris, January 11, 2015. The cartoon on the cover shows a Jew, a Catholic, and a Muslim demanding that “Charlie Hebdo” must be veiled!

speech made by former Algerian president Houari Boumediene in 1974, proclaiming that the southern hemisphere would conquer the northern one through immigration and reproduction: “The wombs of our women will bring us victory.” Due to feminism, Zemmour implies, the wombs of white women have shriveled up. And due to multiculturalism, the flood of fertile immigrants is allowed to continue. This is one more reason why French Muslims should be considered, as he has recently been saying, “*un peuple dans le peuple*”—a classic motif of European anti-Semitism that he has readapted to meet the present danger.

The French term for multiculturalism is *anti-racisme*, and its history is wrapped up with the development—and decline—of the left. Writers like Pascal Bruckner and Alain Finkelkraut, who came from the left, have long argued that left-wing activists made a disastrous mistake in the 1970s by abandoning the traditional working class, which was offended by the culture of the Sixties, and turning toward identity politics. Deserted, the workers turned to the National Front and adopted its xenophobia; in response, the left formed organizations like SOS Racisme that defended immigrants and fended off any criticism of their mainly Muslim culture.

The republican picture of a France that could and should turn peasants and immigrants into equal citizens

wants his readers to share his view. It is one thing to say, as former president of SOS Racisme Malek Boutih has, that the antiracist rhetoric of victimization has blinded the French to the real threat of fundamentalist Islam brewing in the poor urban areas. It is quite another to dismiss out of hand, as Zemmour does, the enormous independent effects of poverty, segregation, and unemployment in making people in those areas feel hopeless, cut off, angry, and contemptuous of republican pieties. The *quartiers* in which they live are modernist architectural disaster areas, brutal in appearance and run down, and far from the few jobs the French economy generates. Incarceration policies throw young offenders in together with seasoned criminals, including jihadist recruiters, and once they have records they are nearly unemployable. Drop-out rates are high, which is why one sees teenage boys milling about on the streets during the day, causing trouble.

The list of policies that contribute to all these conditions—and, if changed, might help to ease them—is long. And France could change them while at the same time policing the streets, maintaining authority in the classrooms, and teaching the republican values of laicity, democracy, and public duty—which one would think Zemmour would favor. But for a demagogue like him it is important to convince readers

*See my article “France on Fire,” *The New York Review*, March 5, 2015.

The Truth About Selma: An Exchange

To the Editors:

I have great respect for *The New York Review of Books*. Thus, I turned with anticipation to Darryl Pinckney's recent piece on Selma, the event itself and the movie that depicts what happened ["Some Different Ways of Looking at Selma," *NYR*, February 19]. I did this from the perspective of someone who, as an assistant to Senator and Vice President Hubert H. Humphrey, was closely involved with the development and passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965.

I regret to say that I was disappointed and puzzled. How is one to explain the series of factual errors I encountered? It's Sheriff Jim Clark—Selma's still-notorious brutal bully—not "Bill" Clark. Mr. Pinckney writes that King's activist leader, James Bevel, was moved to action by the horrendous murder of Jimmy Lee Jackson of Selma. That's misleading because Bevel and his wife, Diane Nash, had developed the so-called Alabama Plan that included direct action in Selma, as well as other Alabama cities, almost two years earlier in the aftermath of the murder of the four schoolgirls at the 16th Street Baptist Church in Birmingham.

In other words, Selma's demonstrations were a long time in the making. In another misstep, Mr. Pinckney has Sheriff Jim Clark ordering the state troopers to stand aside during the "Turn-around Tuesday" second march that is so dramatically depicted in the film. Not so. Sheriff Clark was deliberately kept under wraps by state authorities and played no role. It was Major John Cloud of the Alabama state troopers, acting on orders from Colonel Al Lingo who, in turn, was communicating with Governor George Wallace, who commanded the troopers to move to the side of the highway.

This is significant because the standoff to avoid violence had been negotiated by White House representatives, King, and Lingo. Even though it generated heated opposition from the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee toward King, this agreement also kept the marchers from violating an injunction by the federal district court not to march until the federal district judge had reached a positive decision on whether the march could go forward. The entire episode revealed a growing and ultimately decisive collaboration—a partnership, if you will—between Reverend King and President Johnson.

These missteps point to another and more fundamental concern: Where is the insight that Mr. Pinckney could bring to the current debate about the significance of historical accuracy in cinematic portrayals of controversial past events? True, Mr. Pinckney acknowledges that President Johnson was not the obstacle depicted by the film's director,

Ava DuVernay, and he quotes from well-regarded black leaders to support this characterization. DuVernay, on the other hand, has a different perception of reality, as reflected in her comment that she wasn't interested in making another "white savior movie."

Mr. Pinckney's take on these divergent realities would have been very illuminating. For instance, he could have tackled the question that continues to swirl about this powerful film: How much credence are we to afford the notion that filmmakers can, and should, define distinctly different white and black narratives?

Here's what I think. Passage of the Voting Rights Act was one of the momentous democratic achievements of the last century. It represented an enormous first step in correcting injustices that have plagued—



Martin Luther King Jr. with Ralph Abernathy, James Forman of the SNCC, and Reverend Jesse Douglas leading the march around the state capitol, Montgomery, Alabama, March 25, 1965; photograph by Spider Martin from the exhibition 'Selma March 1965,' at the Steven Kasher Gallery, New York City, March 5–April 18, 2015

and continue to plague—our democracy from before independence. Neither Lyndon Johnson with all his legislative experience and protean energy nor Martin Luther King Jr. with all his eloquence, personal charisma, and organizational skills could win this fight on his own. No question that King kept pushing Johnson and it's equally clear that Johnson kept telling King about the political and legislative barriers that had to be overcome. Both also came to realize that together they could win and apart they would lose. Anything that detracts from the essential truth of this realization is regrettable.

With a commitment to preserving essential truths, the filmmaker can capture stories like Selma in a manner beyond the reach of any other medium. Pinckney, on the other hand, prefers another path:

The book is still the only medium in which you can make a complicated argument.... But for the black experience, the word is still chief witness. Selma was the worst place in the world, James Baldwin said.

With due respect to both Darryl Pinckney and James Baldwin, understanding the

"Selma" phenomenon—in reality and on film—requires a lot more than this.

John G. Stewart

Legislative Director to Senator Hubert Humphrey (1962–1965) and to Vice President Humphrey (1965–1969) Knoxville, Tennessee

To the Editors:

Darryl Pinckney adds his voice to the reviews of the movie *Selma* and supplements his comments by relating aspects of King's campaign not covered by the film. Selma has been observed and written about regularly since 1965. The movie and the fiftieth anniversary of "Bloody Sunday" have only increased that attention. Those of us who live here have learned to live with that. We can point out errors in what is said about us, such as those that occur in the movie and Mr. Pinckney's review (Sheriff "Bill" Clark instead of Jim Clark). But it seems trivial to do so when the basic truth of discrimination and violence that happened in 1965 is so powerful.

Nevertheless, for Mr. Pinckney to conclude his piece by quoting an offhand remark by James Baldwin that "Selma was the worst place in the world" is hard to take. This gratuitous swipe at our town is not related to the movie or the review, and furthermore the statement was untrue in 1965 and is certainly untrue now. Selma in 1965 was guilty of Jim Crow prejudice and denial of voting rights of its citizens, as were hundreds of towns and cities all over the South. But Selma had removed segregation signs from public drinking fountains and begun interracial meetings. Selma's leading citizens had publicly denounced the Ku Klux Klan.

What Selma did have was a brutish sheriff who reacted violently once the marchers got to the courthouse or across the bridge into the county and under his jurisdiction. But the city of Selma had its public safety director, Wilson Baker, who kept the peace while the marchers were under his watch. Under very difficult circumstances, he prevented matters from getting much worse. The violent actions that resulted in the death of Jimmy Lee Jackson did not occur in Selma by the Selma police as the movie implies, but in another town by state troopers.

As a white Selmian who was here in Selma in 1965, I am not proud of the fact that those of us who were opposed to Jim Clark and George Wallace did not speak out more strongly. I am pleased, however, that as a very young lawyer, I was asked to represent Wilson Baker when he ran against Jim Clark for sheriff in 1966 after the Voting Rights Act was passed. Baker had strong support in the white community

and virtually all of the black support. When Clark saw he was going to lose, he confiscated seven or eight boxes from the predominantly black voting districts, declaring them illegal for irregularities. Fortunately, the resulting election contest was removed to federal court, and John Doar arrived to try the case and obtain a verdict for Baker.

Selma now suffers from more than its share of poverty and lack of economic opportunity. Racism, from both white and black, still exists to some degree. But there are many positive signs, and many examples of cooperation and goodwill between the races. There are numerous events taking place over the next several weeks and months, including a "unity" march from the county side of the bridge back into town, a panel discussion with Howell Raines and others, and a visit from President Obama. Selma has budding entrepreneurial and arts movements making a difference in the community. A novelist of Mr. Pinckney's stature would be a welcome addition to the dialogue. I invite him to come on down.

Harry W. Gamble Jr.
Selma, Alabama

Darryl Pinckney replies:

I do make apologies to Mr. Stewart and to all readers for the error of calling Sheriff Jim Clark "Bill" Clark and for attributing the order to withdraw on Turnaround Tuesday to him, when it was the head of the state troopers who gave the order. It may be clear in the film; I should have gone to see it a third time. I should have checked the several documentary sources available. But I don't consider these factual errors "missteps."

I didn't go into Bevel's "Alabama Plan," because the film doesn't. I also don't see where Mr. Stewart and I disagree on the importance of the Voting Rights Act, or on how much Johnson and King needed each other to get it passed.* He's certainly entitled to feel vehemently about the film, but that is a matter altogether separate from what I said about the story this biopic takes from the Selma protest.

I am pleased for Mr. Gamble that his feeling for his hometown inspires him to speak up for those white citizens in Selma who tried to make a difference or recognized that change had to come. But there was nothing offhand or gratuitous about what Baldwin said. Selma was for him a very disturbing experience, a black man from the North accustomed to the harshness of the ghetto, but not to the organized violence of those opposed to civil rights equality in the South. He hadn't liked being afraid. Some time after Selma, Baldwin wrote about his color being a mirror for white people and therefore he had to spend a great deal of energy reassuring them that they did not see what they saw.

*This mutual effort was discussed at length in Elizabeth Drew's "*Selma* vs. History," *NYRblog*, January 8, 2015.

LETTERS

THE DAMAGE TO NFL PLAYERS

To the Editors:

Some readers of my "The Super Bowl: The Horror and the Glory" [*NYR*, March 5] have pointed out that the often-cited high mortality rate of NFL players has been called into question. In 2012 the NFL sent retired players a summary of a National Institute for Occupation Safety and Health study, which found that NFL players lived *longer* than members of the general population.

But the players included in that study had a median birth year of 1950, and were only tracked through the 1988 season. A College of the Holy Cross study tracking players who played during the 1994 season showed similar results about longevity, while also showing that on average the longer a player's career, the shorter his life span. In the last two decades the average size of NFL players, measured by body mass index, has increased considerably. As has, it would appear, the players' speed and athleticism, though that is more difficult to quantify. But we won't know the exact mortality rate of modern NFL players until they're all dead.

A more damning assessment of the sport's dangers comes from the NFL itself.

After being sued by more than five thousand retired players for concealing the long-term effects of concussions, the league hired actuaries to help prepare a settlement, worth approximately \$1 billion, that is now on the verge of receiving final approval by US District Judge Anita Brody. The actuaries found that 28 percent of NFL players will be diagnosed with a debilitating brain injury. They also concluded that prevalence rates of Alzheimer's and dementia among currently retired players were "materially higher than those expected in the general population" and that players would develop these diagnoses "at notably younger ages than the general population." Ken Belson summarized these

findings in *The New York Times*:

Their calculations showed that players younger than 50 had an 0.8 percent chance of developing Alzheimer's or dementia, compared with less than 0.1 percent for the general population. For players ages 50 to 54, the rate was 1.4 percent, compared with less than 0.1 percent for the general population. The gap between the players and the general population grows wider with increasing age.

We don't have a full account of the damages suffered by NFL players. There has not been enough research and some of the

most severe health effects evade diagnosis. In order to diagnose Chronic Traumatic Encephalopathy (CTE), for instance, the subject must be dead. (A Boston University School of Medicine study found that of thirty-four deceased NFL players examined, thirty-three had CTE.) As new studies are conducted, and better diagnostic tools developed, it is possible that the league's violence will come to seem less severe. But the NFL isn't betting on it. The settlement agreement, in which the NFL denies any wrongdoing or liability for the conditions of its retired players, is to remain in effect for the next sixty-five years.

Nathaniel Rich
New Orleans, Louisiana

WAR & THE 'GITA'

To the Editors:

In "War and Peace in the Bhagavad Gita" [NYR, December 4, 2014], Wendy Doniger characterizes what she calls "the warrior's Gita" as an incitement to war, without mentioning that Krishna does not justify all war, any war, but a specific war against oppressive tyrants who have made repeated attempts to murder Arjuna and his family after robbing their kingdom, have tried to strip his wife in public, and have rejected all negotiations, including Krishna's visit to them as an ambassador of peace.

Nor is Arjuna objecting to war itself. He has fought many wars before this one, without a qualm. He objects to this war only because it will require him to fight family members. He argues that if all the men die, the women will have to marry men of other castes, thus destroying what he considers primary dharma. Krishna combats this conventional view of dharma as duty to family, and demonstrates that the ultimate dharma is doing the right thing, even if this involves hurting wrongdoers in the family.

Like any great literary work, the *Gita* is open to interpretation. Doniger claims that *bhakti* in the *Gita* "lacks the passion" that it developed later. Many scholars, including myself, read the *Gita* as the urtext of passionate devotion, encapsulated in Krishna's statement that anyone, including a woman or a person of any caste, can achieve liberation just by offering a flower, a fruit, or water to his or her chosen God. At one stroke, the text does away with the need for expensive Vedic sacrifices, knowledge, or even literacy, instituting instead the simple, home-based or nature-based *puja* (worship) that most Hindus still perform. In passages of great lyrical beauty, Arjuna expresses wonder at the omnipresence of God in everyone and everything.

Finally, on the question of caste. Doniger omits to mention the famous passages where Krishna states that truly wise people see a cow, an elephant, a dog, and a dog-eater (the last is a reference to those of so-called untouchable castes) as the same, that is, as manifestations of the Universal divine Spirit/Self (Brahman/Atman). Nationalists like Gandhi and Rajagopal-achari read this as an anticaste statement. Krishna's injunction to follow swadharma (one's own dharma) can be read as endorsing caste duties, but it can equally be read (and has been widely read) as endorsing one's own individual dharma (the law of one's own being), which is an accumulation of all one's past actions in this and in past lives.

This would explain how Krishna, a member of the cowherd caste, serves as Arjuna's charioteer in the battle (a job that would normally be performed by one of the charioteer caste). Everything in Arjuna's life has brought him to this moment. His dilemma is very much like that of Prince Hamlet, although he resolves it differently.

R. Vanita
Professor of Liberal Studies
University of Montana
Missoula, Montana

Wendy Doniger replies:

The *Gita* does indeed say all that Ruth Vanita says it says, and more. Like other great religious texts (including the Bible), the *Gita* expresses a number of different opinions on many subjects, opinions that various people have cited to argue for various purposes, picking out the *Gita* verses that support their agendas and ignoring verses that express conflicting views. And this complex *reception* history, rather than the content of the *Gita*, is the focus of Richard Davis's book and my review.

Professor Vanita rightly cites *Gita* verses challenging caste, while I cited verses that many people have used to justify caste. (Indeed, as she herself points out, one of Arjuna's objections to the war is that it might result in intercaste marriage, which he regards as a horrifying possibility.) And granted that the war that prompts the *Gita* conversation is a particular sort of war, internecine and lawless (as I too noted), a war against brutal and dishonest tyrants, many people have used the *Gita* to justify any war (in particular, war against the British). As for my own emphasis, I selected, in my short review, verses that provide a historical context for the political manipulation of religion in India today. (In September, India's newly elected prime minister, Narendra Modi, gave President Obama a special edition of the book entitled *The Bhagavad Gita According to Gandhi* at a White House dinner.)

The protean flexibility of the text is one of the many reasons why it has been so popular. But not *everything* in Hinduism is in the *Gita*. I agree with Professor Vanita (and said in my review) that the *Gita* is in many ways the urtext for *bhakti*—the path of devotion to the *Gita*—but *bhakti* in the *Gita* does not yet reach the heights of passion achieved by the later Bengali songs to Krishna and Radha, or the devotion to Shiva that inspired Tamil and Kannada tales of violent self-sacrifice. These and many other forms of Hinduism call upon texts other than the *Gita* to express their religious sentiments.

CORRECTIONS

In Mark Lilla's "France on Fire" [NYR, March 5], the leader of the National Front is Marine Le Pen.

In Jennifer Homans's "In Balanchine's Beautiful Forest" [NYR, March 5], the second-act pas de deux in George Balanchine's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* was choreographed on Jacques d'Amboise and Violette Verdy, although the opening night was danced by Verdy with Conrad Ludlow (d'Amboise was out). Allegra Kent understudied and later took on the role; you can see her performance with d'Amboise in the film of the ballet.

In Jeff Madrick's "The Rocky Road to Taking It Easy" [NYR, March 5], the foreword to *Social Security Works!* is by David Cay Johnston.

In Freeman Dyson's review of Frank Close's *Half-Life: The Divided Life of Bruno Pontecorvo, Physicist or Spy* [NYR, March 5], Pontecorvo's reply in 1992 to a Russian government official trying to arrange for him to be interviewed by a visiting historian was "I want to die as a great scientist, not as your fucked spy [*vash jebanyi shpion*]."

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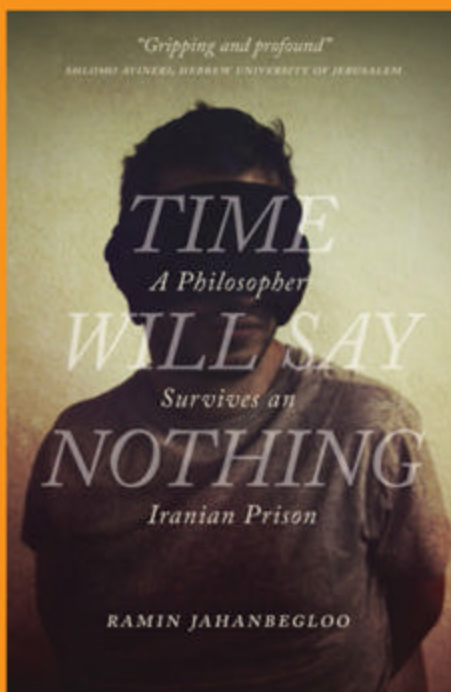
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